

THE  
**INVESTIGATORS**  
in

**THE MYSTERY OF THE  
HEADLESS DEEJAY**



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Whenever Norman Hamley plays his brand of music every midnight at the Planet Evil disco, the place is always packed. Nobody really knows who this disc jockey is, and to top it off, he appears resembling a devil without a head! His mix of music is strangely captivating that it drives the patrons wild and crazy on the dance floor. Soon, accidents happen as a few people collapse suddenly while dancing. The Three Investigators take on this strange case as they suspect that there is a devilish scam behind it...

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Mystery of the Headless Deejay

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## 1. In the Fever of the Night

The nerves were strained to breaking point. Hearts pounding, Jupiter and Bob held their breath.

Pete, on the other hand, forced himself to the utmost concentration, because for him it was all about everything—victory or defeat. His right hand remained calmly about ten centimetres above the table top, while he bent his middle finger down bit by bit. Slowly, very slowly, he touched the pointed end of the Mikado stick and pressed gently against it, so that the other end slowly rose up. Had one of the five remaining sticks, which were wedged underneath, moved? He was relieved to discover that that was not the case.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Pete startled. Reflexively, his hand twitched to the side and bumped so violently against the remaining Mikado sticks that they scattered one by one on the tabletop.

“It’s my turn!” cried Jupiter enthusiastically. He collected the five sticks and held them up triumphantly. “I’ve won, Pete! I’ve won!”

Bang! Bang! Bang!

“What idiot is banging on our door?” Pete, furious, jumped up from his chair, pushed the handle down and ripped the door open with a jerk.

“Boo!”

Pete backed away in horror. In front of him stood a darkly-dressed figure who had pulled a black, wide-brimmed hat over his face.

“I am Norman Hamley the Headless, and I invite you to an audience at Planet Evil.”

Pete’s heart was beating up to his neck. “Who... who are you? And, uh... What do you want?” he stammered.

The dark figure took off his hat and laughed at Pete in the face. “Don’t be scared! It’s only me!”

“Jeffrey!” Pete forced himself to smile. “Boy, you scared the living daylights out of me! Do you realize you just ruined my victory with your performance?” He pointed to Jupiter, who was grinning at him as he bundled up the Mikado sticks and put a rubber band around them.

“I was 12 points ahead of Jupe. If you hadn’t banged on the door like a lunatic, then—”

“Don’t you want to invite our guest in before you rip his head off,” Bob intervened, signalling a courteous gesture to Jeffrey to take a seat in a battered chair. Jeffrey gratefully accepted the invitation while Pete leaned against the sink, sulking.

“Speaking of ripping someone’s head off,” Jupiter turned to Jeffrey, “did your greeting ‘I am Norman Hamley the Headless’ have a deeper meaning, or how may one interpret your spectacular performance that ultimately helped me win?”

Jeffrey put on a mysterious face. “I gather from your question that the talk of the town, which has been all over Rocky Beach since last night, hasn’t got to you yet.”

Bob pricked up his ears with interest. “Come on, out with it.”

“You’re familiar with Planet Evil, aren’t you?” Jeffrey asked The Three Investigators.

“If that refers to the disco that opened last year in Rocky Beach, I’m familiar with it. Although I have to admit that I have not visited the place yet,” Jupiter replied in an important

tone of voice. "After all, dancing it not one of my greatest hobbies."

"I can only agree with that," Bob added.

"Besides, I heard once that they charge an outrageous entrance fee." Pete tapped his finger contemptuously on his forehead. "Twenty dollars, if I'm not mistaken."

"It's a lot of money," Jeffrey had to admit. "Nevertheless, I took a look at the place last night. Some friends told me about the wacky disc jockey Norman Hamley, who is said to be able to cast a kind of magical spell on the patrons at Planet Evil."

"So?" Jupiter asked sceptically. "Could you agree with your friends' verdict after having personally gone to this disco?"

"More than that!" Jeffrey's eyes began to glow. "The dancing crowd went wild! As soon as Norman Hamley put on the first song, the crowd went wild! They rushed out onto the dance floor, which was covered with dry ice, and they just danced to the music!"

"Sounds not bad," Pete replied with a questioning undertone. "But what's so extraordinary about it?"

"The audience danced as if they were in a trance!" Jeffrey said. "Mandy, my classmate, was the first one on the dance floor. The more the beat of the music increased, the more she rolled her eyes and emitted shrill sounds. She no longer seemed to be herself, sweating all over her body and constantly reaching for invisible stars with her hands out in the air."

"Sounds amazing, but still pretty much normal," Jupiter commented. "Under a magical spell, I imagine something far more spectacular, for example, when—"

"You're not letting me finish," Jeffrey interrupted Jupiter. "That was just the beginning! Shall I go on?"

Jupiter nodded silently.

"The music Norman Hamley played on his two turntables was pure madness! Had you been there, you would've agreed with me without a doubt! I got really dizzy. The beats were in time with my heart, the bass was vibrating all over my body, and suddenly... suddenly I felt a happiness I had never felt before, it was... absolutely unique! And while I was dancing, I watched Norman Hamley standing on the platform behind his equipment, marvelled at his scratching and mixing skills... and I can't understand how he did it without showing his head."

"Excuse me?" A deep wrinkle formed on Pete's forehead. "What do you mean?"

"So you really don't know yet," Jeffrey stirred up the boys' curiosity. "Hamley is dressed behind his mixing desk in a dark robe with a high stand-up collar. But there's nothing in where his head should normally be! It's missing!"

Bob grinned at the corners of his mouth. "Stop fooling around! A headless deejay—is that what it is? Every man has a head sitting on his neck!"

"You don't have to explain it to me, but I saw it with my own eyes!" Jeffrey insisted.

"But he must be able to see something!" Pete said. "... If only to drop the needle accurately onto the record..."

"I have no idea, Pete," Jeffrey waved off. "I don't know. That's not what this is about. The unbelievable thing is that it wasn't me who danced to the music, but the music told me how to move! And on his pedestal, the deejay stood in his devil's robe and conducted us like we were puppets on strings.

"Mandy had fallen under his spell. Her body carried out exactly every movement that the deejay seemed to dictate to her as if with an invisible baton in his left hand. Maybe it was just because of the music, but Mandy could not be stopped in her euphoria. More and more she fell into a kind of trance while dancing, with her eyes directed exclusively at Hamley. She literally adored the deejay. And then it happened!"

"Well, what?" Pete urged impatiently.

"Suddenly, Deejay Hamley's arms reached out to Mandy as if to embrace his 'devotee' and then..." Jeffrey took a deep breath. "It was really scary. Mandy seemed to have been hit by an invisible energy charge and passed out in the middle of the dance floor.

"An ambulance was called immediately. But Mandy, who recovered amazingly quickly, refused to be brought home by the paramedics. Imagine that—she wanted to continue dancing. And the other patrons were not impressed by the incident in the slightest. It was a crazy atmosphere, I tell you, like in a witch's cauldron! You have to see this."

"Forget it," Jupiter replied firmly. "I can invest the twenty-dollar entrance fee better. I've been thinking for weeks about buying a new crime encyclopedia for exactly the same price. Although, quite frankly, I would be tempted to take a personal look at the headless deejay, in this case I'd rather opt for literary pleasure."

Jeffrey got up from his chair. "You can have the crime encyclopedia, Jupe, because you don't have to worry about the entrance fee. You are invited, so to speak."

"Have you received an inheritance?" Jupiter asked in surprise. "Or won the lottery?"

"Nonsense! Did I give you that impression? A friend of my older brother works behind the counter at Planet Evil. She was agreeable to unlock the toilet window from the inside at midnight last night, and promised to do me this little favour again tonight... But only under one condition—if we get caught, we can't tell on her."

Thirsty for action, Jeffrey looked at the boys. "Tonight at the witching hour, Deejay Hamley will once again be on fire! How would you like to be part of this adventure?"

"Of course!" cried Pete and Bob as if from one mouth. "And what about you, Jupe?"

"The prospect of going to a disco leaves me relatively cold, Jeffrey," Jupiter said calmly. "But a close up look at a headless deejay awakens my curiosity. Count me in!"

The Three Investigators were impatiently awaiting the coming night. The night was starry. Not a cloud was visible in the sky. But Jeffrey was nowhere to be seen either. Pete kept looking for him impatiently while he waited with Jupiter and Bob in front of the agreed meeting place—the two toilet windows at the back of the disco. It was just before midnight.

"What do we do if Jeffrey doesn't come?" Bob expressed his concern. "Hope that the toilet window will open anyway."

"Jeffrey is a friend you can count on." Pete pointed to the street. "Here he comes!"

Jeffrey casually strolled towards them. "Hi!" He had combed his blond hair back with gel and was wearing, like Jupiter, Pete and Bob, jeans, T-shirt and sneakers. "What did you tell your parents about where you were going tonight?" Jeffrey took a quick look at his watch.

"Truthfully, we are spending the night at Bob's tonight," Jupiter explained. "His parents have gone to Las Vegas for the weekend to visit relatives. So nothing stood in the way of our plans."

Jeffrey buried his hands in the wide pockets of his jeans. "I'm staying with my brother tonight. Of course he keeps his mouth shut and wants to stop by the disco later. It's going to be a hot night! By the way, did you see the long queue of patrons at the entrance? The doorman is a disgusting and arrogant snob and sends everyone away whose face or clothes don't fit him."

Suddenly the boys noticed right next to them, there was a faint noise. Jeffrey pointed to the toilet window that had just been opened from the inside. In the frame of this window, the face of a young woman appeared.

"Hurry!" she hissed and stepped nimbly to the side to let them in.

"You first, Jupe! I'll make you a robber ladder." Pete acted immediately. He knew that Jupiter, with his plump figure, was the most unathletic of them all and would only have needlessly delayed their plans without help.

"Great, Ellen!" Jeffrey rejoiced after going through the toilet window last. "It's crazy how many people are here tonight!"

"Not so loud!" Hastily the young woman closed the window and put her finger to her lips as a warning. "If it comes out what I just did, I'll be out of a job. You know that! So remember our agreement."

Jupiter was about to reply something witty when suddenly the door was opened in front of them. Scared, the five of them flinched.

"Hey! What on earth are you all doing here?"

## 2. In a Party Mood

Pete looked into the face of a young woman in astonishment. Her eyes, with which she strictly fixed on the four boys, were framed by garish make-up. Her tight-fitting costume of black leather and the high-heeled boots emphasized her already strict appearance.

“Are you deaf?” She came closer. “What are you doing in the ladies’ room?”

Ellen acted spontaneously. She pulled her face and pointed disgustedly to the sink. “A cockroach, Pam! I was about to wash my hands when suddenly a cockroach the size of a thumb crawled out of the drain! I was screaming like crazy when these boys here came to my rescue!”

“You’re gonna meet hundreds more of these cockroaches in your life, Ellen!” The woman scornfully glanced at the sink. “America is littered with these crawlies. They cannot be eradicated and would even survive a nuclear war.”

“I could throw up!” Ellen shook herself. The Three Investigators and Jeffrey were thrilled by the spontaneous acting of their accomplice. Pam, on the other hand, pointed unmistakably to the door of the ladies’ room with a sour face.

“Out now, boys! There’s nothing left to look at! I’ll take care of the rest.” With a quick movement of her hand she turned on the tap and let hot water run into the basin.

Relieved, Jupiter pulled his friends outside with him.

“See you on the dance floor, Ellen!” Jeffrey said.

While the two women were still standing in front of the mirror, the boys left the neon-lit toilet and entered the dark, winding rooms of the disco via a narrow hallway.

Roaring basses sounded from all sides, colourful spotlights flashed and from every angle, happy voices were heard. Jupiter, Pete and Bob looked around interested, but still with a sinking feeling in their stomachs.

“Loosen up, guys!” Jeffrey encouraged them. It had not escaped his attention that his friends had a lot of uncertainty in their limbs. “Ellen’s reaction was great! Drop all reservations. We won’t be thrown out of here! Come on, let’s throw ourselves into the fray!”

The boys followed the pounding beats expectantly, leading them straight to the dance floor. Under the disco ball equipped with hundreds of small mirrors, a frolicsome group of sweating dancers who were completely devoted to the rhythms of the music.

There were a lot of young people sitting on bar stools at the sides. With cool drinks in their hands, they watched with fascination what was happening on the dance floor.

Jupiter let his eyes wander through the disco. Where was Norman Hamley? Although he discovered the approximately metre-high platform on which a disc jockey, in obviously the best party mood, was playing hot disco music, this young man certainly did not look like the mysterious deejay that was described to them. Jeffrey seemed to guess Jupiter’s thoughts.

“Hamley’s gig doesn’t start till midnight, Jupiter! The mood among the patrons is already boiling, but wait until the magician appears in person!”

“Fellas!” Bob pointed towards the dance floor. “Am I wrong? Isn’t that Lucy from school? Look how she’s dressed!”

Pete lifted his neck up to see better. “I can’t get myself together again! I can’t recognize her!”

For a moment, The Three Investigators devoted all their attention to the girl. The otherwise so inconspicuous schoolmate with her long reddish hair was heavily made up and danced in a leopard-patterned overall to the stomping beats of a house-style song.

“What make-up and clothes can do,” Pete remarked aptly. His knee bounced enthusiastically to the beat of the music. “You know what? I really feel like dancing right now!” And before his friends could respond, he got up off the bar stool and head out onto the dance floor.

Jupiter could not wipe away a grin. “I have never seen Pete dance! It’ll be fun! It’s a shame none of us have a video camera with us!”

“Don’t make fun of Pete, Jupe,” Bob suggested. And he kept looking around examining himself. “Getting out on the dance floor seems like a smart move. In a disco, it’s the best place to blend in. If we are caught here by a security guard without the entrance stamp on the back of our hands, the fun can quickly come to an end before it has really started for us. That’s why I would say let’s not sit around here and join Pete on the dance floor. A little exercise would do your plump figure a world of good, Jupe! What about you, Jeffrey? Are you with me?”

Jeffrey nodded enthusiastically and followed Bob, who pulled Jupiter single-mindedly onto the crowded dance floor. Pete was already dancing exuberantly to the music, whose rhythmically hammering basses roared mercilessly from the loudspeakers.

When the Second Investigator took a quick look to the side, he noticed an elderly lady next to him who seemed completely caught up in the intoxication of the music. Her body, which she had squeezed into a tight sequinned disco dress, seemed to be electrically charged as she danced, while her made-up mouth continuously gave way to small cries of enthusiasm.

“Yeah! Yippee! What an atmosphere! This is some party, folks!” She shook her head wildly, an orange curly wig was sitting on it.

Pete couldn’t help smiling. He liked this freaky disco-goer, who obviously had reached retirement age long ago, but still threw herself into the nightly dancing pleasure full of verve and with great zest for life.

“Amazing, huh?” Jeffrey approached Pete and pointed quietly at the older lady. “She is known as Amy Scream. This crazy old lady is the centre of attention every weekend. She’s always the first and the last on the dance floor!”

“Crazy apparition,” Pete replied with a grin. “When I’m that old, I hope I’ll be as energetic as I am now.”

Jeffrey raised his eyebrows and whispered into Pete’s ear: “Her inexhaustible energy is not innate, but artificial.”

“Huh? What do you mean?” Pete asked.

Amy Scream was getting completely out of control and was whirling her arms around as if they were made of rubber.

“Party pills,” Jeffrey replied dryly. “Some kind of stimulant. The disco queen makes no secret of this. After about every fifth song she takes a little pill and then continues dancing all the more freaked out.”

Pete left his mouth open in surprise. But he didn’t have time to deal with this information, because suddenly the lights went out and the music stopped.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” it came out of the speakers in a deep voice through the pitch dark disco. “Just in time for the witching hour, we now come to the climax of tonight’s show! Imported from hell, we bring you the devil’s deejay, Norman Hamley!”

### **3. The Headless Deejay**

A glaring spotlight shone on the podium, where Norman Hamley appeared from nowhere in his devil's robe behind the mixing console. At the sight of the headless deejay, a murmur went through the excited audience, but the sudden, piercing bang of a smoke bomb silenced it. Then, in the rising mist, Hamley stepped up to the microphone and raised his arms in an imploring manner.

“And now... it’s show time!” With a practised hand, the deejay dropped the needle onto the record.

A loud gong sounded, which was immediately followed by a hammering beat, accompanied by keyboard sounds. Within seconds, the dance floor turned into a seething witch’s cauldron.

Jupiter was a bad dancer. But even to him, the music drove his limbs so hard that he moved his body to the rhythmic sounds without thinking about it.

“Amazing!” Bob cried enthusiastically and seemed to dive into another world while dancing.

Norman Hamley watched over everything. And even though the disc jockey performed his art without a visible head, Jupiter imagined that he could see a superior grin on the collar of the robe.

In the meantime, Pete’s eyes wandered back and forth between the deejay, his friends and Amy Scream. The older lady seemed to have taken a liking to him and danced around him. Once she even winked at Pete while he was dancing, until she suddenly danced right next to him and approached his ear with her mouth. “You seem to be here for the first time. You’ve really got it, the dancing!” She pursed her lips cheekily.

“Excuse me?” Pete asked in a rattled voice. He thought he heard wrong.

The lady grabbed his hand firmly and pulled him to the edge of the dance floor.

“You’re a good dancer!” Amy Scream beamed enthusiastically while her left hand pulled a small bottle out of the narrow side pocket of her dress, unscrewed the lid and poured two small red lozenges that looked like party pills into the palm of her hand. Quick as a flash she made one of them disappear in her mouth, the other one she handed to Pete. “Here. I’ll give you one of my party pills!”

Once again Pete thought he had misheard. But although he already guessed the answer, he turned himself in ignorance. “What... What is this?”

“The ticket to happiness! The very last scream,” the lady said. “Take one of this, and you will rise above yourself. Feel good and dance away!”

“No, thanks,” Pete refused sceptically. “I don’t need drugs. I’m already in such a good mood!”

“Drugs?” Amy Scream grinned mischievously. “These things are over-the-counter and completely harmless! Whether you drink coffee three times a day or poke this pill is practically the same for your body.” She happily tinkled her long, glued eyelashes. “So be smart and be there!”

Pete hesitated and threw a short examining glance to his friends on the dance floor. Jupiter, Bob and Jeffrey gave themselves completely to Deejay Hamley’s mixing skills. They

didn't seem to take any notice of the Second Investigator at the moment.

"Well, what is it?" Amy Scream followed up. When Pete looked at her indecisively, she defiantly pulled back her hand. "Well, so what? How could anyone be wrong? You didn't strike me as a coward."

At these words, Pete involuntarily flinched. If he hated anything, it was to be seen as a coward. Since the beginning of their friendship, Jupiter and Bob had called him a coward on numerous occasions, mostly in situations where he himself would have spoken of innate caution and not cowardice.

Hurt in his pride, Pete grabbed the pill, which was still in Amy's open hand, and with one quick movement he put it into his mouth.

"Yeah," the crazy old lady commented dryly. "This will give you more energy to dance! Now come back out on the dance floor with me!"

Meanwhile Jupiter and Bob had taken a critical look at the apparently headless deejay. Both boys asked themselves the same question—with which trick was used to create the illusion of standing behind the mixing desk without a head?

At that moment, Deejay Hamley put on a new song. The singer sang in an unusually deep female voice with hypnotic effect, accompanied by strange sounds that had never been heard before. This increased the dance frenzy of the patrons even more.

Bob looked at Jupiter questioningly. "This singer, this voice... she sounds kind of familiar..."

The bass relentlessly pounded out of the speakers, making the walls of the disco vibrate. Amy Scream headed for the middle of the dance floor and gave an uncontrolled scream of enthusiasm that did credit to her name.

The crowd raved, formed a large circle around the lady, who was dancing as if out of her senses, and cheered her on with rhythmic clapping to perform ever wilder movements.

"Where have you been?" Bob casually asked when Pete appeared on the dance floor again. But he received no answer.

Jupiter was also fascinated by Amy Scream's performance. Unconsciously, he let himself be carried away to spur the bizarre old lady on to increasingly unusual body contortions. Like everyone else, he clapped along in the ever more hasty rhythm and was hardly to be stopped. Bright laser flashes, rotating spotlights and thick clouds of smoke, together with the wild music, created a real dance frenzy. Now not only Amy Scream was getting out of control.

Deejay Hamley masterfully understood how to make the seething masses dance to his will. Amy Scream was sweating out of her pores. Totally uncontrolled, her skinny figure whirled around like a top in the centre of the dance floor. Her oversized ear clips lost their grip and flew away in a wide arc.

The crowd broke into storms of enthusiasm and demanded more with shrill whistles. The tempo of the music increased like in a whirlpool, to which Amy Scream was able to adapt herself effortlessly for the time being. Deejay Hamley gave this special performance an additional kick by slowly but steadily increasing the turntable speed. At this speed, the old lady's pearl necklace broke and the individual beads rushed like bullets in all directions, hitting the patrons all around.

At that moment, the performance, which had been highly entertaining up to that point, took a dramatic turn. Amy Scream suddenly began to stagger, clutching her chest with a painfully contorted face. With eyes wide open, she sank to the dance floor and lay there motionless.

Bob was the first to grasp the situation. With one leap he rushed towards the old lady and knelt down beside her.

“Let me do it!” From behind him, a strong hand grabbed him by the shoulder. “I’m a paramedic!”

Bob drove around and looked into the face of an athletic young man who instantly raised Amy Scream’s arm to take her pulse. Only now did the music and bright lights fade away.

It was only gradually that the patrons grasped the gravity of the situation. Jupiter, Pete and Jeffrey had joined Bob, who was still kneeling excitedly next to Amy Scream.

“How is she?” Jupiter looked at the paramedic with concern.

With a serious expression on his face, the paramedic pulled a mobile phone out of his pocket and keyed something in quick succession.

“Ray, this is Ron,” he said softly into the mobile phone. “I’m here at the Planet Evil disco. Send two people over here right away. There has been a tragic incident. A elderly lady had just collapsed on the dance floor. She suffered a heart attack and died.”

## 4. Vanished Without a Trace

The paramedic pushed the onlookers back politely but firmly. Jupiter, Pete, Bob, and Jeffrey heard some fragments of conversation in the angry murmur, which made them listen attentively.

“It was bound to happen sooner or later. With the enormous consumption of stimulants!”

“It’s a wonder she lasted this long at all. I would have collapsed much sooner!”

“To spend your old age like that, it couldn’t have worked.”

“Terrible thing!” Jeffrey turned to his friends. “But in the end, it’s every man for himself. Grandma should have known what she was doing to herself. After all, drugs are not to be trifled with!”

Pete had to swallow and became as white as a sheet. When he saw Amy Scream lying on the floor in front of him, he started to shiver and a wave of bad conscience came over him. Could he have prevented the terrible fate of the old lady by advising her not to take the party pill? He also reproached himself greatly for not having vehemently rejected Amy Scream’s colourful pill.

Confused, he glanced at his friends. Could they see his guilt? Perhaps not with Jupiter, who was nervously pinched his lower lip while he attentively focused on the platform on which the mysterious deejay had just performed his music extravaganza a few moments ago.

“Strange...” mumbled Jupiter, lost in thought. “Most peculiar...”

“What are you talking about, Jupe?” Pete asked.

“Did any of you actually notice where Norman Hamley disappeared to after the lady collapsed?” asked the First Investigator.

Bob shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. I rushed to the lady’s aid. After all, that was more important than anything else at that moment!”

“All right, Bob,” Jupiter replied in an important tone of voice. “But don’t be surprised that the patrons and the entire staff rushed right over, while the deejay... has immediately disappeared from the scene?”

“Well,” Jeffrey said. “Perhaps he has just quickly got rid of his robe and is now among us. After all, we don’t know who’s hiding under that stand-up collar coat!”

At that moment, two paramedics with a stretcher made their way through the onlookers and bent down to attend to the lady on the dance floor. One of them checked her condition once more before she was carefully bedded on the stretcher and carried out of the disco covered with a blanket.

Ellen, the counter girl, was visibly upset. Stunned, she bent down and lifted the orange-coloured wig that had slipped off Amy Scream’s head when she fell.

“The wig!” she shouted desperately after the paramedics. “They’ve forgotten her wig...”

But Ellen’s call was no longer heard, because in the same moment the bright neon light went out, and as if nothing had happened, stomping dance music resounded from the loudspeakers. But it was not Norman Hamley who was now sitting behind the mixing desk. An unknown deejay with a head continued the night programme on the raised platform.

For Jupiter, Pete, Bob and Jeffrey, the fun was thoroughly over.

“What do you think, fellas?” Jupiter turned to his friends. “I don’t think it makes sense to put us on the trail of the ominous deejay here and now, who in my opinion was not entirely uninvolved in the tragic end of the ageing disco lady. The prospect of being caught snooping around in this place without a valid stamp seems too risky to me. So let’s get out of here and call it off for now. After all, tomorrow is still a day.”

The friends’ unanimous nod was the clear signal to leave Planet Evil by the fastest route.

An old discarded mobile home trailer located at The Jones Salvage Yard served as headquarters for Jupiter, Pete and Bob’s detective agency. The salvage yard was managed by Jupiter’s uncle Titus and aunt Mathilda Jones. For years, they had been following their passion for getting to the bottom of mysterious events and incidents. In the course of time, they had built up a considerable reputation for good detective work under the name ‘The Three Investigators’, which was known far beyond the borders of Rocky Beach.

Their headquarters had everything that was necessary for investigations and detective work—from an answering machine, computers with Internet access, a fax machine, a crime lab to a small darkroom for film development. Over time, The Three Investigators had collected many useful things. In the meantime, the trailer was bursting at the seams. Nevertheless, the boys felt so comfortable in it that they almost regarded it as their second home. And also that afternoon they had gathered here to talk about the strange events at the Planet Evil disco the night before.

Jupiter Jones, the First Investigator, opened the meeting with a serious face. Cross-legged, he had made himself comfortable in a battered armchair and took a deep breath. “So, fellas, I don’t know about you, but I for one slept very badly last night. This case is one of the most tragic we’ve had.”

Pete Crenshaw, the Second Investigator, stared sceptically at his friend. “What is that supposed to mean? Yesterday’s event was a shattering experience, the likes of which none of us would wish to relive... but I ask you in all seriousness, what case is there to investigate?”

“I wonder, Jupe,” interjected Bob Andrews, who was responsible for Records and Research. “According to Jeffrey, the circumstances that ultimately led to the death of the disco grandma are obvious. After all, the woman was not the youngest and was known for her extravagant lifestyle. You don’t need any expertise to imagine that continued drug use is harmful to your health and often, as we witnessed live yesterday, can even be fatal.”

Jupiter did not let himself be put off by Bob and Pete’s comments. “That’s how I see it as well, fellas... but you should always focus on what’s important.”

“What’s important?” Pete asked. “What do you mean by that?”

“Would you be surprised that a previously unknown disc jockey apparently has the ability to drive his audience into a dance frenzy in such a way that they are hypnotized by him? That includes myself,” Jupiter remarked. “Until yesterday I was a strict opponent of ridiculous dance attempts... but even I couldn’t resist Deejay Hamley’s mixing skills.

“Remember the night before last? Mandy fainted under Hamley’s influence. The ambulance was called in. And the next night, a crazy old lady was so under his spell, it actually ended fatally.”

The First Investigator rose from the chair with a grunt, and looked seriously at his two friends. “I ask you in all seriousness, how can a deejay be able to unleash such inexplicable powers through his music and his demeanour?”

A cold shiver ran down Pete’s spine. “Some things can’t be explained, Jupe. I know it sounds silly, but maybe Deejay Hamley really is in league with the devil. After all, you don’t

know who or what is under that black robe.”

“Come on, Pete!” Jupiter shouted at the Second Investigator in an overbearing tone. “We are a serious business! Ghosts, devils, witches and demons only exist on Halloween! As has often been proven in our previous cases, everything can be explained rationally. I bet my title as ‘First Investigator’ that this time again we are dealing with a rotten spell. And that’s why I’m happy to give it to you in writing—these strange occurrences cry out for clarification and are therefore a case for The Three Investigators!”

“And where do you intend to start, Jupe?” Pete played nervously with an eraser in his hand. He still felt remorse over the death of the old lady, in which he felt a bit involved.

“We need to track down Norman Hamley to get to the bottom of his secret to mass manipulation,” Jupiter said firmly.

Bob inevitably had to grin. “I’m just wondering, though, what insight you hope to gain from it. I mean, deciphering the deejay’s trick is nothing more than trying to uncover the illusion of a stage magician. Don’t we have anything better to do?”

“Have I ever let you down?” the First Investigator asked. “The whole thing stinks! I suspect that there is more to this affair than we can currently imagine. Why, for instance, did Norman Hamley disappear from the scene so suddenly after Amy Scream had literally danced her last dance? And why did Mandy, otherwise in good physical condition and well-trained, which we could all see at the last sports festival, happen to faint the night before?”

Jupe looked questioningly to his two silent friends. “Well? You know our motto—‘We Investigate Anything’—especially those that reeks of mystery.”

“You keep talking about a case, Jupe,” Pete interjected. “But who is our client in this case? Who is asking us to investigate?”

Defiantly, the First Investigator crossed his arms. “This time it’s just different. Why shouldn’t one person from our midst assign us a case? I am the one seeking help from The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones can’t find a moment’s peace after yesterday’s experiences and asks The Three Investigators to investigate the mysterious events at the Planet Evil disco as soon as possible.”

Bob blew his cheeks out. “That’s a pretty big deal, Jupe. Since you put it this way, I bow to your wishes, especially when we don’t have another case in the works at the moment.”

“How about you, Pete?” Jupiter asked.

“What else can I say?” Pete replied aptly. “I am practically outvoted—as usual.”

“Excellent!” Jupiter was clearly in his element.

“We should be able to find out quickly from Jeffrey the name of the notorious deejay who is hiding under his robe. Jeffrey’s brother is friends with Ellen, the counter girl. I’m sure we’ll be able to get all the information we need from her. I’m interested in everything, even the smallest detail, that has any connection with Norman Hamley—who he is, where he comes from, how long he’s been on the job, and whether he’s worked at other discotheques before Planet Evil. Simply everything! Pete, as you have the best connection to Jeffrey, you should contact him.”

The Second Investigator nodded. “No problem. I’m meeting him in two hours anyway. We have a surfing appointment.”

“That settles everything,” Jupiter decided and took a quick look at the wall clock. “I suggest that we meet here again tonight around eight o’clock to see what Pete can find out.”

## 5. In League with the Devil

The Second Investigator was not punctual. It was already 8:30 pm when the door of Headquarters was sweepingly opened and Pete stepped in with a bright red head. He was sweating all over his body. With a panting tongue, he opened the refrigerator, took out a can of cola, which he drank in greedy sips, and then wiped his mouth. Only then did he sit down exhausted on one of the uncomfortable camping chairs.

“Say nothing, fellas. I know I’m late. But as you can easily see, I’ve worked hard on my bike to get here in time. Jeffrey and I lost track of time while riding the waves again. It was absolutely amazing! The wind conditions couldn’t have been better—over and over again.”

“You can tell us about that later, Pete!” Jupiter spoke ungraciously. Nervously he drummed his fingers on the armchair. “Did you find out anything useful from Jeffrey’s brother?”

“Indeed. But I’d like to take my shoes off first, if you don’t mind.” In all his calm, almost in slow motion, Pete got rid of his sneakers. Then he leaned back with a groan and took a deep breath.

“Brian, Jeffrey’s brother, readily provided information after Jeffrey called him on his mobile phone. I wrote down everything that might be important.” He pulled a wrinkled notebook from his pocket.

“Listen! According to Brian, about a year ago a certain Jim Cowley rented the premises of Planet Evil and opened the discotheque. Cowley is still relatively young, in his mid-twenties, and is rarely seen in person at this well-run establishment.”

The First Investigator was impatient. “And what about Hamley? What did he tell you about the deejay?”

Pete took full advantage of his lead in information. Smiling, he pointed to the fruit bowl that was on the shelf next to Jupiter. “Could you perhaps pass me a banana first? I urgently need a boost of energy now that I’ve almost pedalled myself to death on my bike earlier.”

With gritted teeth, Jupiter complied with this request. “Here you are. But I warn you not to test my patience too much!”

“Well, Jupe,” Bob sneered. “You can experience first-hand what it feels like to have to pull information out of other people’s noses. As is often the case, Pete and I are the ones who suffer this treatment. It takes a lot of pushing and shoving to get information out of you.”

“Are you two conspiring against me? I’m really not in the mood for such childish things right now!”

“Calm down, Jupe!” Pete waved off. “Have you lost your sense of humour? I’ll continue. I’ll eat the banana afterwards—as a reward, so to speak.”

He closed his notebook demonstratively. “Whatever there was to say about Norman Hamley, I didn’t need to write it down because there’s really no information about the notorious deejay.”

Now it was Bob who found his mouth opened in surprise. “What do you mean?”

“Like I said. Nobody really knows anything specific about him—neither his origin, nor his residence, let alone what he looks like. And Cowley keeps a very low profile of his employees, especially Hamley. Through his girlfriend Ellen, Brian knows that the headless

deejay always arrives in a black limousine shortly before midnight for his gigs at Planet Evil. By that time, he is already in his robe.

"After he completes his show, which lasts exactly one hour, he disappears in the same way he came. Cowley hired Norman Hamley himself. The only info Cowley gave was that Hamley had previously worked in Las Vegas—also as a deejay. Other than that, nobody knows much about him."

The First Investigator rubbed his hands in satisfaction. "You've earned your banana, Pete. Go ahead! I know now what I wanted to know."

"You know what, Jupe?" Bob said. "Is it possible that I missed something revealing?"

"I don't know. In any case, we have a clue that will allow us to proceed," Jupe said. "At least finding Jim Cowley's address shouldn't be too difficult. The owner of Planet Evil is our man. We'll suck on him like leeches until we get all the information that uncovers Norman Hamley's identity and his secret!"

Bakersfield was not only the centre of the Californian oil industry, but also the residence of Jim Cowley, the owner of the Planet Evil disco. The downtown area was a mixture of new offices and restored old buildings, including a church built in 1868. Next to the church was a single house surrounded by a small, well-kept garden. According to the entry in the digital telephone directory, this was the domicile of the young entrepreneur, whom Jupiter, Pete and Bob wanted to visit the following afternoon—without prior notice.

The Second Investigator parked his red MG in a small car park on the opposite side of the street and looked over to the property with a dull feeling. "Jupe, I hope that you can give Jim Cowley a plausible reason for our sudden appearance without immediately arousing his suspicions."

"Take it easy, Pete. Has your leader ever been short of an excuse? After our conversation, Cowley won't even remember what we scribbled out of him."

"Assuming he's even at home," Bob remarked dryly as he and Pete followed Jupiter, who had already left the car and headed purposefully for the house. 'J. Cowley' was engraved on a tarnished brass plate next to the door bell.

Without any sign of nervousness, Jupiter pressed the bell button. Pete involuntarily flinched. Had the curtain moved behind the upstairs window? A few seconds passed without anything moving. Then behind the door, footsteps could be heard approaching.

"What do you want?" an unfriendly male voice came through the front door. "I'm busy!"

The First Investigator was not impressed by this statement. "After speaking with us, Mr Cowley, many things will appear to you in a different light!"

"Are you with some kind of religion?" it sounded suspiciously back. "The constant ringing of the church tower bell over there robs me of my last nerve! If you're on some religious mission, you'd be better off next door!"

Pete and Bob exchanged a quick glance. What could the First Investigator do about it?

"We are well-informed in the relevant circles that you are in league with the devil—specifically, one of his henchmen by the name of Norman Hamley," Jupiter said. "We too prefer to dance to the rhythms of the Devil's deejay rather than listen to a church organ. However, if you prefer that we contact the press, we'd be happy to leave!"

Suddenly, the door opened. In front of The Three Investigators stood a pale, barefoot person in a bathrobe, looking grim.

"Who are you?"

Jupiter put on his friendliest smile and held out their business card to the baffled businessman. The card said:



"You can't be serious?" Mr Cowley promptly said. "Where are you from? A nursery school?"

Jupiter did not let himself be thrown off course. "We paid a visit to Planet Evil last night, where the deejay Norman Hamley I mentioned earlier seems to be responsible for some rather questionable incidents. Hopefully, you know that the show and the resulting incidents with a subsequent death consequence will bring about a bad sequel. There are major gaps in the press coverage, which we will certainly look into in more detail."

Mr Cowley drove excitedly through his tousled hair. "Are you trying to pin something on me?"

"This is exactly what we would like to talk to you about personally," Jupiter replied. "How about inviting us in for a moment? It's very difficult to resolve this matter out here."

"Who's to say the press didn't send you here to get at me?" Mr Cowley suspected, giving them a penetrating look. "The tragic accident at the weekend is a hit for the reporters, who will seize every opportunity to discredit my disco by linking the harmless gag with the devil's deejay to the death of the crazy disco lady! Surely you don't seriously believe that Norman Hamley is a disciple of Satan whose job it is to take my patrons off the dance floor and into purgatory?"

"Aren't you going to invite us in?" the First Investigator repeated his question emphatically.

Mr Cowley took a step forward outside and demonstratively pulled the door shut behind him until just before it locked. "I still see no compelling reason for this. What on earth are you trying to accuse me of? I am a tax-paying, innocent citizen of a free country. You have nothing to reproach me for."

"But I see it decidedly differently," replied Jupiter briskly, determined not to be turned away. "The deejay whom we have learned from a reliable source that you hired in Las Vegas and brought to Los Angeles, is without doubt at least partly responsible for two sensational accidents in your discotheque. It's hard to dismiss that."

The features of the young entrepreneur hardened.

"Norman Hamley is currently one of the most popular deejays on the entire West Coast and his unique show in my establishment will soon make him world-famous!" Cowley said. "If you are so eager to find out the secret of his success, visit my discotheque and try to get on the trail of the phenomenon! But like everyone else, you have to pay the twenty dollars entrance fee. Drinks are not included."

Bob stared at him boldly. "You don't mind walking over dead bodies for your profits, do you, Mr Cowley! Can you really afford to have another ambulance pull up in front of Planet Evil the next weekend?"

Mr Cowley raised his hand impulsively, but in the middle of the movement, he suddenly stopped and instead buried his hands in the pockets of his bathrobe with a triumphant grin.  
“Forget my generous offer. I have memorized your faces carefully and will give the doorman strict orders to chase you away if you dare to go anywhere near my disco!”

Without giving the boys another glance, he turned around, went back in, and slammed the door. As if moved by thunder, The Three Investigators stood in front of the house.

## 6. Devil Dancer

The mood in the headquarters of The Three Investigators was gloomy. Jupiter still hadn't recovered from the massive rejection of Mr Cowley, which was eating away at his self-confidence. It was not very different for Pete. Even the computer game Mahjong which flickered on the computer monitor before their eyes, could not provide the two detectives with the distraction they had hoped for.

"I don't know what's keeping Bob," Pete moaned with a sigh. At the same time, he clicked sullenly on the computer mouse.

Jupiter lifted his gaze from the screen questioningly. "Are we expecting him here now, Pete?"

"No, but if he were here, we could make a democratic decision."

Visibly irritated, Jupiter now gave Pete his full attention. "Could you please be more specific?"

"Well..." Pete struggled to find the words. "Haven't you ever thought that after our setback with Jim Cowley that it would be wiser to throw in the towel? The whole case seems doomed to failure from the outset. If Bob were here now, nothing would stand in the way of a fair vote. I, for one, have already made a decision."

"I can already guess." The First Investigator frowned. "Should you really have forgotten by now that your decision is in stark contrast to our basic iron principle? Giving up is out of the question for The Three Investigators!"

Annoyed, Pete asked: "Could you explain to me clearly what remains to be investigated in this matter? I admit that Mr Cowley's behaviour was a blow to us, but basically there is nothing more to add to what he said. His discotheque had an exaggerated level of frenzy, but isn't it the same at many pop concerts? With all the boy bands, such fainting fits in the audience are on the agenda, Jupe. The patrons at Planet Evil have a similar experience with Norman Hamley's brand of music. I think you're stuck on a case that isn't a case at all. If Bob were here right now, he'd agree with me. I'm sure of it!"

As if on command, the door of the trailer opened at that moment and Bob entered Headquarters beaming with joy. "Hello, fellas!" he exclaimed, waving a CD in his hand. "I'd say our case is developing."

"What?" cried Pete in astonishment. Almost immediately, he jumped up from his chair and grabbed the CD, which Bob held out to him. Interested, he looked at the cover. In bright neon colours were the wordings 'Monique Carrera' and 'Devil Dancer'.

"Give me that!" Jupiter demanded. Astonished, he fixed on the photo of the singer with the long blonde hair and gave a surprised whistle. "I can't believe it! Our old friend Miss Carrera has become a pop star! Where did you find this CD?"

Bob enjoyed his triumph. "I stopped by Sax Sendler's place to pick up my wages for last month, and there it was—next to various new releases on Sax's desk was this masterpiece. Sax is regularly showered with the latest hits by music publishers!"

"Have you ever listened to it, or why are you calling it a masterpiece?" Pete asked. "And what on earth has this CD got to do with our... uh... case?"

"Both of your questions are directly related!" Jupiter said. "Judging by the expression on your face, Pete, you have not yet grasped the solution of the puzzle, although you had inevitably witnessed a performance that should have answered your two questions. But it seems that your full attention that night was on other matters, which I will certainly return to later."

Pete felt anxious when Jupiter gave him a penetrating look. Again a bad feeling overcame him. He instinctively felt that Jupiter had watched his brief encounter with Amy Scream on the dance floor—an encounter that he wished with all his heart to be able to banish from his memory as soon as possible.

Against his will, his thoughts returned to the night in question. As if through a haze, he saw himself and the old lady standing at the edge of the dance floor and relived the scene in which he had received the small colourful party pill.

After he had put the pill into his mouth, a new song was played, which pulled Amy Scream back onto the dance floor as if she was electrified... *Devil Dancer* was sung in a deep voice—a voice that seemed familiar to him, but at that point in time, he could not figure out who it belonged to—but now he knew! The Three Investigators knew Monique Carrera from a previous case.

"Of course!" Pete exclaimed. "You speak of a masterpiece because they already played this song at Planet Evil and we heard it there with great enthusiasm!"

"You got it," praised Jupiter. "But a good detective should always be careful to articulate himself as precisely as possible. It was not 'they' who played Monique Carrera's song, but a certain Norman Hamley—the deejay who is on assignment from Jim Cowley at Planet Evil. The rude owner of this disco will soon regret having underestimated The Three Investigators because soon, it will be proven that I was correct with my assumption that something is not right in that disco."

"Here you go again," Pete asked impatiently. "But how is the case developing, as you say, Bob? This CD may come as a surprise, but what does it tell us?"

Bob's eyes began to glow. "The scoop is still to come!" With nimble fingers he opened the cover of the CD and presented the booklet to his friends. "Do you know what's written about the song in small print?"

"It can only be a matter of seconds before we know it!" Jupiter was gripped by an inner turmoil. "Out with it!"

"The song *Devil Dancer* was mixed by none other than..." Bob said, beaming, "Norman Hamley!"

Jupiter gasped for breath. "You're kidding, Bob!"

"See for yourself." Bob said and passed the CD booklet to Jupiter.

"Hmm... One strange coincidence follows the next, but still I am of the opinion that Jim Cowley didn't lie to us and that the whole thing is a cleverly staged advertising campaign," Jupiter remarked. "Admittedly, his disco hasn't been too well-known so far, and it is a rather strange way to make the place interesting for patrons. It's disturbing, but with this approach, the incidents at Planet Evil appear in a different light, especially the tragic death of Amy Scream. Tastelessness without limits, but Jim Cowley's calculations seem to work out."

"I'll bet you anything... the club will be bursting at the seams over the next few weekends. The dance-hungry crowd will be lining up outside the disco hoping to be there live when Norman Hamley's mixing skills on the dance floor cause another victim to collapse."

"But how would that work?" Bob asked.

"That's what we're gonna find out, fellas!" The First Investigator took an important pose. "If Jim Cowley won't give us information about Hamley, we have another way to find out

about the deejay.”

Triumphantly, he held the CD up in the air. “Monique Carrera is the key to the secret fortress. So Hamley mixed her song. It would have to be with the devil if she couldn’t give us some insightful details about him. I’ve already got me a—”

The shrill ringing of the phone interrupted Jupiter. Annoyed by the interference, he switched on the loudspeaker and picked up the phone.

“The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speaking.”

“Hello, Jupiter,” a deep female voice came up. “This is Monique Carrera. I think I have a case for you!”

## 7. The Top of the Charts

Monique Carrera had lost nothing of her charm and attractiveness since her last encounter with The Three Investigators. Jupiter, Pete and Bob agreed on this when they met the elegantly dressed woman early in the evening in the cocktail bar of a hotel.

After the bartender had served them four non-alcoholic fruit cocktails, Miss Carrera came straight to the point of their meeting.

"I can't talk about this with anyone but you," she said. "You might even declare me crazy afterwards, but that's a risk I'm willing to take." She sucked on the straw with short gulps. "I don't know if you've heard about this... I recorded a song last month that was released on CD a few days ago."

Jupiter nodded. "*Devil Dancer*. We know that. We got this recording after listening to it at the Planet Evil discotheque last weekend."

"You were—what?" Miss Carrera nearly choked on her drink. "I don't believe in coincidence, but this is exactly what I wanted to talk to you about." She lowered her voice. "On the radio, there was a report that in this disco an elderly person had fatally collapsed on the dance floor while intoxicated with drugs."

"We didn't get anything from the radio message," Bob explained to the distraught Miss Carrera. "We were there and we witnessed the tragedy. It happened right before our eyes."

Miss Carrera's lips began to tremble uncontrollably. "I hate to admit it, but I do not believe I am entirely innocent of this terrible incident."

"Amy Scream—as she was known—fell to the ground at the time Deejay Hamley was playing your song, Miss Carrera. There's no doubt about it. But to think that you were partly to blame is highly exaggerated," Bob tried to reassure her. "Admittedly, it's strange that Hamley played the very piece he is responsible for mixing on your CD. But coincidence or not, what do you personally have to do with this?"

A sign of appreciation swept across Miss Carrera's heavily powdered face. "My respects—you've done your research. But what you don't know for certain is that I have signed a contract with the devil!"

"Can you explain this to us in more detail?" Jupiter asked apparently calmly. His fingers, invisible to Miss Carrera, plucked nervously at the long fringes of the tablecloth.

"Best I start from the beginning." Miss Carrera removed from her handbag, a shiny silver cigarette case.

Shortly afterwards, Miss Carrera, leaning back in her comfortable leather armchair, blew blue haze into the air. "It began about three months ago when I received an interesting phone call one evening. The caller introduced himself to me as Norman Hamley, a deejay who had previously worked successfully in Las Vegas and had now moved to California to build a second career as a music producer.

"I was visibly irritated and asked him for the specific reason for his call. His answer amazed me as much as it made me curious." She took another puff on her cigarette. "He told me that he had created a musical masterpiece to which he was only missing the appropriate singing voice. When I then asked him how he came to me of all people, and I told him in the

same breath that even in the shower I was not able to sing one note correctly. He gave me a plausible explanation without hesitation.”

“And what was it?” Pete had finished his cocktail. He was now consuming the tropical fruit, the decorative accompaniment to his drink.

“Hamley saw me on TV when I was doing an interview.” Miss Carrera pulled a lock of her hair out of her face. “He liked my appearance and was especially taken with my deep voice. This unique voice, he said, in combination with his music and the lyrics that were already written for it, would propel me to the top of the charts within a few weeks!”

“Sounds really tempting,” Pete had to admit. “Then what?”

“Then I visited Hamley in his studio to listen to the song. To be honest, I was immediately taken with the piece. I got goose bumps and suddenly had this impulsive urge to dance!”

Thoughtfully Jupiter began to pinch his lower lip. “It was a strange phenomenon. We, and the majority of the other patrons at Planet Evil did not fare any differently, although I would describe myself as possibly the most awkward dancer of the Californian west coast.”

Miss Carrera smiled, but immediately became serious again. “When I described this feeling to Hamley, his eyes began to glow strangely. ‘Shall I tell you the secret that awakens this feeling in you?’ he asked me. What a question! I nodded in agreement.

“Hamley was sitting in front of one of his countless keyboards at that time and suddenly played a few low chords off the cuff—the sound of which made my hair stand up. It would have been kind of grotesque if it wasn’t so scary at the same time!”

Pete was overcome with a shiver just from listening to it. “What happened next?”

“Hamley explained to me that the effect of the strong sensations was from the tones. He gave me a diabolical grin when he realized that I didn’t know what he meant,” While Miss Carrera talked, she looked around several times in a state of uncertainty, as if she feared being overheard. “Then, he became more specific. He said that his composition was conceived using a strictly scientific process.”

The First Investigator pricked up his ears attentively. “What did you make of it?”

“I admit I’m not an expert in this field, but at least I paid enough attention in physics classes at Playwood College back then to be able to follow Hamley’s scientific explanations at least to some extent. The hearing range of a healthy human ear is able to perceive deep tones from twenty cycles per second to the brightest whistle sound of twenty thousand cycles per second. This so-called frequency range is completely different in the animal world. A dog, for example, is able to perceive frequencies three to four times higher than a human. In the low frequency range, for example, whales and elephants are able to send and receive so-called ‘sub-basses’, which are far below the hearing capacity of a human being.”

Pete touched his head in a disturbed state. “I don’t understand any of this. What in the world does this physics lesson have to do with your hit *Devil Dancer*?”

“That’s exactly what I’m going to talk about.” Miss Carrera vigorously put her cigarette out in the ashtray. “Obviously I went too far. The matter can be reduced to a simple common denominator—the tones that are no longer audible to the human ear, nevertheless affect our subconscious in various ways and influence our feelings.”

Jupiter was visibly impressed by Miss Carrera’s account. “I have read of a similar phenomenon before. However, it was not about acoustics, but about optical stimuli with which certain sensations can also be manipulated. This method is also used by the secret service, for example. Even the best-trained agents were no longer able to keep their secrets to themselves after days of interrogation under the influence of a constantly repeating flashes of light.”

Bob scratched his head thoughtfully. "And why is this so, may I ask?"

"Our brain normally works in such a way that we have the impression that we can rely on it one hundred percent," explained the First Investigator with his index finger raised. "But there are ways and means to mislead rational thinking in a simple way. The continuous flashes of light, which I have given as an example, triggers a chemical reaction in the brain that makes it impossible, even with the greatest effort, to continue to withstand the agony of silence."

"Slowly we're getting closer, Jupiter." Miss Carrera smiled approvingly. "With the targeted use of this subconscious technique, however, it is also possible to trigger positive feelings, which can even be increased to the highest euphoria. Norman Hamley has, according to his own statement, found ways and means of incorporating these subconscious sounds into his composition, which can put the listener into an inexplicable state of happiness."

For a moment, there was a perplexing silence. The First Investigator could clearly see that his thinking apparatus was running at full speed. Finally, he took a deep breath and focused his attention on Miss Carrera. "You can consider yourself lucky. In all probability, your single, *Devil Dancer* will reach the top of the charts. But what makes you ask us for our help? Norman Hamley may have used unusual methods in producing this, but he hasn't broken the law."

Miss Carrera's radiant face darkened. Suddenly, deep lines of worry ran down her attractive face. Within seconds, she seemed to have aged years. "I have signed a confidentiality agreement with Hamley. But if the distribution of the single *Devil Dancer* is not stopped immediately, more accidents are guaranteed to happen!"

## 8. On Hamley's Trail

"Do you really believe that Norman Hamley's composition is responsible for the death of Amy Scream?" the First Investigator said with a matter-of-fact undertone. "I mean, do you have any concrete evidence to support this?"

Miss Carrera's eyelids began to flutter in excitement. "I can't give you conclusive evidence, but the facts speak for themselves! So I urge you to take over the case, boys. Find out if it is technically possible to influence people through music to the point where they lose all control over themselves and fall victim to a dangerous lunatic!"

Excited, she gasped for breath. "I heard that a schoolgirl collapsed while Hamley was playing my song last weekend at Planet Evil! There's no reason for this to happen."

"We were wondering about that too," Bob had to admit. "We know that Amy Scream was heavily drugged shortly before her death, but Mandy, the first victim of the accident, was almost certainly not. She is our schoolmate—an athletic ace with a very good physical condition, and consistently averse to anything that could harm her health... and yet she collapsed on the dance floor."

Jupiter folded his hands and forced himself to concentrate. "After all that has been discussed here in the meantime, I am quite willing to believe that the euphoria that the song *Devil Dancer* arouses in its listeners is due to Norman Hamley's stringing together of certain tones and your deep singing voice, Miss Carrera. But the fact that one can suffer physical harm simply by listening to a pop song is really puzzling to me."

"Oh no?" Monique Carrera didn't let herself be put off. "Hamley assured me that his composition was a serious attempt to fight the ruling music industry. With him incorporating suggestions into his music, he would succeed in driving the listeners of his productions willlessly to buy his CDs. And for that..." she swallowed, "he would be ready to walk over dead bodies!"

"Those were his words?" Bob replied uneasily.

"That was exactly what he told me!" Miss Carrera raised her right hand. "I know this all must sound crazy to an outsider, but find out if Hamley really intends to use people as pawns in his financial interests! Whatever he has planned and however he goes about it, please find out." She looked at The Three Investigators almost pleading with them. "Will you take the case?"

Jupiter gave Miss Carrera a confident smile. "You can rely on us completely, ma'am. But if we are to make progress in this matter, we lack some vital information that only you can give us."

"I'm listening."

"First, we need the complete details of Hamley's residence and the studio where you went to see him," Jupiter said. "The corresponding phone numbers, including his mobile phone, wouldn't be bad either."

"I don't have his home address, but I can tell you where his studio is." With a snap of her finger, Miss Carrera opened her spacious handbag, took out a small notebook and a ballpoint pen. She wrote down the information on the back of her business card. "What else do you want to know?"

"Well," the First Investigator hesitantly began. "My next question is only indirectly related to our investigation, but I would still like to know the answer."

"Out with it!"

"We saw Hamley's show last weekend at Planet Evil. The deejay gave the patrons the illusion of performing his mixing and scratching skills without showing his head. There was not the slightest sign of him between the high collar of his wide cut robe. Do you have any idea how he does that trick?"

Miss Carrera shook her head decisively. "I know his performance only by hearsay because I haven't set foot in that disco myself. To tell you the truth, after all the bad news, I don't have too much interest in going there either." She cleared her throat.

"Still, I wonder how you managed to gain entry to this disco? To my knowledge, the entrance fee is twenty dollars. Three of you will cost sixty dollars. Surely you did not throw that much money down the operators' throats, or am I wrong?"

"You are not mistaken, ma'am," Jupiter took the answer. "But after all, we are detectives. Outwitting arrogant doormen at a trendy night club is one of our easiest exercises. We've gained access to every location that needs to be watched!"

"Well, I trust you will have your ways," Miss Carrera expressed her admiration. "Nevertheless, there remains the matter of the fee. What is your fee for a job well done?"

Pete rode off in indignation. "To you, ma'am, we work for free, of course. Furthermore, it is an honour for us to be at your service at all times. For you, we would even—"

"Okay, that's enough!" Jupiter interrupted him in his excessive remarks. "As far as I'm concerned you can woo Miss Carrera by any means necessary, Pete, but not on false pretences! Or should you have forgotten by now that we generally do not charge any of our clients?"

Pete shot into the air with a vengeance. "You, of all people, are talking about false pretences? What about your self-adulation, which you had to brag about to Miss Carrera not even a minute ago?" In a remarkably similar tone of voice, he imitated Jupiter's voice.

"We've gained access to every location that needs to be watched!" Don't make me laugh! How did it go with Jim Cowley, the owner of Planet Evil? You talked your mouth off, Jupiter Jones, and yet he coldly rejected us in front of his door! You, of all people, should be the one to embarrass me in front of Miss Carrera!"

Despite the fierce argument, Bob inevitably had to grin. "Come on! Prepare for a duel! The winner is rewarded with an expensive dinner with our future star in one of California's finest restaurants. But I warn you, don't bite each other's heads off because only one of you will win." Conspiratorially, he winked at Miss Carrera. "I'm dying to be the only remaining member of our detective trio to take you to dinner, ma'am!"

When Bob arrived at Headquarters the next afternoon, there was no sign of yesterday's argument between his two friends. Jupiter and Pete sat together at the shaky camping table and were busy making a list.

"Hi, fellas!" Interested, Bob came closer. "What are you doing?"

Jupiter only looked up briefly from his work. "Something we should have done long ago." He scribbled a name down on the piece of paper and handed it to Bob, who quickly skimmed through the list.

All of the names looked familiar to him. "Mandy Robin, Lucy Stryker, Ronald Bridge, Mitch Cooper and Jeffrey Palmer," Bob read from the list. "So? They're all our schoolmates. But what does that mean?"

"We know exactly that these people were at Planet Evil last weekend while Deejay Hamley was performing his show," Pete told his friend. "We were able to see Lucy's presence for ourselves on Saturday. For the other names, we have to rely on Jeffrey completely, and he confirmed that he had seen these five people on Friday at Planet Evil."

"We should ask all these people if they noticed anything strange on the nights in question that might help us in our investigation," Jupiter added. "I am thinking especially of Mandy, as she was one who was physically affected by Hamley's performance. First thing tomorrow, we will conduct meticulous questioning sessions in the school yard."

Exhaustively, he took one look at his watch. "Speaking of meticulous questioning, it's 4:00 pm, fellas. If we hurry, we should be able to find our headless deejay in his studio during daylight. And today, we will persist and not be turned away again."

According to Miss Carrera, Norman Hamley's recording studio was located in Ventura, a small beach town between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara.

After an almost half-hour drive, Pete steered his MG off the beach promenade to an inconspicuous industrial estate and stopped the car next to a garbage container.

"A rather unattractive location," Jupiter remarked, looking at a disparaging panoramic view of the site, where several closed car repair shops in need of renovation were located. But a faded company sign unmistakably indicated that The Three Investigators were at the right address, despite initial doubts.

A rusty outside staircase led up to a glazed entrance door, to which a faded PVC film was stuck. The inscription read: 'Hamley's Sound Kitchen'.

Without much hesitation, the First Investigator pressed the worn-out bell button. It took quite a while before a buzzing sound signalled that they were allowed to enter. Shortly after Jupiter, Pete and Bob had entered the meagre anteroom, a wiry-looking woman came towards them with brisk steps. She looked at the three visitors very critically.

"Can I help you?" she blurted out. "I'm about to leave, and according to my schedule, you're not expected here. So what do you want?" Her already thin lips curled into a thin line.

Jupiter decided to take a step forward. "Relax, Miss... uh?"

"Lockler. Susan Lockler," she answered sharply. "So, what's it about?"

Jupiter tried to find a charming smile. "It's all quite harmless, Miss Lockler. We just want to see Norman Hamley. By any chance is he in the studio right now?"

Miss Lockler made a scornful sound. "Do you imagine that you can just interrupt a busy musician's creative process without an appointment?" She crossed her arms demonstratively. "Sorry, boys. My job is to separate the wheat from the chaff. In this case, I'm kindly giving you a full minute to get out of here before I notify our security guards, who will send you out on a very rude charge of trespassing!"

Jupiter wanted to counter Miss Lockler's unkind words, but Bob held him back and countered in his own way. "Forget it, Jupe. As far as I can tell, Norman Hamley is not here at this time. The only thing in the abandoned car park, apart from our vehicle, is a rickety lady's bicycle." He looked at Miss Lockler in a derogatory fashion. "That shabby bicycle appears to be the only appropriate official vehicle that Norman Hamley can provide for his secretary!"

Without further comment, The Three Investigators turned their backs on the perplexed receptionist and shut the glass front door behind them.

"I hate to admit it, fellas, but at the moment, I don't seem to be very successful in forecasting the situation." Groaning, the First Investigator let himself sink into the back seat of the sun-heated MG.

Pete threw encouraging looks at him through the rear view mirror. "Even though it's hard, Jupe, take it easy. After all, none of us could have known that this miserable dragon would get in our way." He started the engine and drove the car towards the dusty exit.

Bob obviously had difficulties not to let his frustration show. "Don't take this the wrong way, fellas, but in this case, I feel like I'm standing still. What's the next move?"

"It's crystal clear," Jupiter said optimistically. "We're still going after Hamley."

Pete moaned. "Surely you're not planning on us lurking outside Hamley's studio for an indefinite period of time, hoping that the deejay will show up at some point?"

Plagued by the heat of the afternoon, the First Investigator wiped the sweat from his forehead with a quick movement. Panting for fresh air, he rolled down the rear window and enjoyed the incoming wind. "Why should we make it easy for ourselves when it can be complicated? We know from Jeffrey's brother that Hamley always arrives in a black limousine for his midnight gigs at Planet Evil and makes his return trip in it after he has completed his one-hour show. Despite Jim Cowley's special ban on us, I see a promising opportunity to get closer to Norman Hamley. Next Friday, we will wait in the MG in front of the disco. When the master of illusions leaves, we'll follow him!"

Bob blew a whistle of enthusiasm. "Sounds good, Jupe. All good things come in threes, and includes attempts!"

## 9. Meticulous Questioning

The shrill ringing of the school bell tore Jupiter away from his thoughts. Not much of the past history lesson Mrs Seven had taught had stuck with him. No matter how captivating her remarks about the French Emperor Napoleon might have been, the mysterious deejay kept coming to the fore in his head. The First Investigator racked his brain, which was why Norman Hamley was constantly popping up in his mind and haunting him like a restless ghost. But even with the greatest effort, no logical explanation came to his mind.

“Off to the big interrogation,” a voice suddenly whispered into his ear from behind. Distraught, Jupiter turned around. There stood Bob and Pete, eager for action and ready to set off for the school yard.

“Did we wake you up?” Bob joked as he bit off a large chunk of his lunch. “You look like you’ve been dreaming about a ghost.”

The First Investigator got up clumsily from his chair and began to massage his left lower leg with intensive hand movements. “Almost right. But it wasn’t me who fell asleep during the history lesson, but my left leg. And you’re not entirely wrong with your second remark either, Bob. Norman Hamley actually haunts my head the entire time. So we’d better get on with our case and put a quick end to his obscure spook before any more innocent people get hurt.”

“Your explanations are almost right, Jupe, but not precise,” Bob countered, wiping the breadcrumbs from his mouth. “How can one speak of Norman Hamley’s sinister activities when his head seems to have disappeared into thin air?”

Jupiter guided his friends to the exit of the classroom. “I’ve already worked out a plan on how to best approach the questioning of our fellow schoolmates. The best thing will be to split up. You, Pete, take Lucy Stryker. Ronald Bridge and Mitch Cooper will be Bob’s responsibility. I will approach Mandy Robin.” The First Investigator gave the door a swinging push and stepped resolutely out into the school yard with his friends.

Bob didn’t have to keep a long lookout for the two students he had to interview. By chance, Mitch Cooper and Ronald Bridge were sitting together on the freshly mowed lawn in front of the gym. The two were busy exchanging collectible baseball cards.

“Hi!” Bob joined them cross-legged and marvelled at the immense number of collectible cards that lay colourfully scattered before them. “Is your collection still not complete? You two have been trading back and forth for weeks.”

Ronald looked up briefly and pointed to a deck of cards that was almost the height of an upright cigarette pack. “These are all duplicates! How many dollars do you think we’ve already brought to the store? The cards we’re missing were not in any of the packs.”

“It’s all a scam,” Mitch said, ranting. “We’re pretty sure there’s some rotten strategy behind it. It is likely that some cards were deliberately withheld and will not be made public for six months.” Ronald noticed Bob’s critical expression on his face.

“Say nothing now,” Ronald said. “We know ourselves that such a fraud had to be boycotted, but we are just addicted to the collecting madness. The publishers of this card edition have us under their thumb.”

"Speaking of madness," Bob skilfully directed the conversation to the subject under discussion. "Last weekend, you were at Norman Hamley's show at Planet Evil, right?"

Mitch just nodded casually. He was busy sorting the cards. But Ronald listened. "I thought it was pretty cool what the deejay was doing. That guy's got a real knack for creating a great party atmosphere. Were you there? I didn't see you at all."

"Pete, Jupe and I were there on Saturday." Bob lay calmly on his back, closed his eyes and let the sun shine on his face. "The patrons went crazy with the music, and we were no different. This was not my first visit to a disco, but I've never experienced anything like this before! Would have been a fantastic night for sure, but after that tragic accident at midnight, we weren't in the party mood anymore."

"Are you speaking of the old lady?" Ronald shook with trepidation. "Thank goodness I wasn't there. People dying isn't really my thing. Even when Mandy suddenly collapsed while dancing, I expected the worst at first. Did you hear about her fainting spell?"

"Yes," Bob replied.

"You may hate to think of it, but death lurks around every corner." Ronald took a deep breath. "We were all so glad when Mandy opened her eyes again and got back on her feet. Still, there was something kind of weird about it..."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, how shall I put it..." Ronald searched for the right words. "As far as I know Mandy, she is always critical and reserved about anything new. She's too serious for my taste. I would even call her a 'party pooper'. But at Planet Evil, she did not have the slightest trace of all these characteristics. This headless deejay, whom she really adored while dancing, seemed to have robbed her of all her senses. It was almost as if she had changed completely."

Ronald's descriptions made Bob think. "How did you feel at the disco while Norman Hamley was doing his show?" he asked both boys. He hoped to get some useful details from Mitch as well. But Ronald's classmate was still immersed in the world of baseball cards and was counting the number of his duplicate cards in a highly concentrated way without being distracted.

"If you ask me, it was scary," Ronald admitted openly. "Because honestly, I felt the same way Mandy did on the dance floor. I sometimes thought I wasn't myself anymore. I was completely clear in my head and still felt like I was in an inexplicable frenzy. I know it sounds stupid, but maybe this deejay actually has psychic powers..."

Annoyed, Mitch shoved a deck of cards together. "Are you almost done talking? The class break doesn't last forever, Ronald, and we haven't even discussed the terms of our card-swapping yet."

"Sorry, Bob," Ronald apologized. "But baseball cards is now the top priority."

Bob rose from the lawn. "Got it. One last question."

"And what's that?"

"Entering Planet Evil is not exactly cheap. I guess you don't have \$20 left. How did you get in?"

"Well," Ronald replied pointedly. "I could ask you the same question."

Bob saw no reason to hide the truth from his schoolmates. "We were able to cut our way through a back entrance. More precisely, it was the toilet window. And you?"

Ronald's face had a big grin on it from ear to ear. "We got in the same way!"

Pete was surprised when he found Lucy Stryker in front of the juice bar in the school hall after a long search. There might be a difference of almost ten years between her appearance

at Planet Evil and here on the school grounds, the Second Investigator judged after careful inspection. Now the adult-looking disco princess had transformed herself back into a young student.

“What are you staring at?” Lucy’s words almost sounded bitchy.

“Attractive girls must be prepared for this at all times,” Pete replied with disarming charm. “To be honest, I find you far more attractive without make-up.”

Visibly flattered, Lucy drove herself through her hair. “So I guess you saw me at Planet Evil, huh?” She smiled sheepishly. “That was just a disguise to trick the bouncers. It worked, though—which proves that in life it’s often the superficialities that get you ahead.”

“On the surface, you may even be right,” Pete said. “The only question is, what is your goal?”

Lucy pondered for a few seconds to be able to give Pete a quick-witted answer. But right off the bat, she didn’t want to think of anything else to say. The Second Investigator used this pause for thought for his purposes. “Did that headless deejay really get to you? Planet Evil was a hive of activity last Saturday.”

A short twitch went through Lucy’s face. “Why are you asking me this?”

“Actually, it’s nothing,” Pete reacted with an innocent look. “Deejay Hamley is the talk of the town in Rocky Beach.”

“Oh, yeah? That’s funny I hadn’t noticed.” Lucy Stryker took a step back. “In your own best interest, I can only advise you to keep your mouth shut. You know what they say: ‘Speech is silver, silence is golden’. If the school management gets even the slightest inkling that we students are hanging around the disco at night and illegally, the director will immediately send a warning letter to our parents. I don’t know about you, but my grades are on the line anyway. Now please leave me alone.” She passed Pete with her head held high and left the school hall in a hurry.

Shaking his head, the Second Investigator looked at her leaving. What on earth had suddenly got into her?

## 10. A Case of Madness

Mandy Robin was considered a sporting ace. No matter whether it was tennis, swimming, running or weight training; everyone who was aware of her physical activities was certain that she would become an Olympic champion in the near future.

The First Investigator approached the bench in the school yard where Mandy had made herself comfortable and was engrossed in a thick book.

“Hello, may I bother you for a teeny, tiny moment?” Jupiter interrupted her.

Mandy looked up for a second, then she closed the book. “You’re lucky. I just finished the last chapter.” She moved over a little. “Have a seat.”

Jupiter gladly accepted the offer and took a seat. “What are you reading?”

“A detective novel—*The Hockey Killer*.” With her finger she tapped on the title illustration of the book, which showed a hockey stick smeared with blood. “The spooky cover promises more than the story can deliver—neither compelling nor particularly witty.”

“I suppose you’re interested in everything remotely sporting, aren’t you?”

“That’s right.” When Mandy realized Jupiter wasn’t paying attention to the book, she put it in her backpack. “You wanted to talk to me?”

“Exactly.” The First Investigator crossed his legs, pulled an apple out of his lunch box and took a hearty bite.

“What is it?” Mandy asked.

“About your fall last Friday at Planet Evil. What exactly happened there?”

Mandy looked at him irritated. Obviously she was uncomfortable with the question. “I don’t quite understand what you’re getting at. Could you be more specific?”

Jupiter was surprised. With Mandy, he didn’t seem to have an easy time. Like in a tennis match, she fended off the questions addressed to her and peppered them back to him with a precise rebound. Nevertheless, he was determined not to leave the field a loser.

“When Jeffrey told me about your fainting spell on the dance floor, I was frankly very surprised and at the same time extremely worried,” Jupe said. “After all, you’re considered the best athlete in our school. Is there any reason to be concerned about your health right now?” He fixed his eyes on her.

“I’m in great shape!” Mandy defended herself spontaneously. “But when I go to a place where there is a serious lack of oxygen, I am forced to breathe in the smoke of hundreds of cigarettes, not to mention the acrid disco fog. Physical failure can occur quite quickly under these conditions.”

“Even when you are in good shape?”

“Yes.”

Jupiter didn’t let up. “Could there be any other reason to explain your unexpected breakdown that night?”

“You have a really weird way of expressing yourself,” Mandy suspected. “But I also know that you and your friends Pete and Bob run a detective agency. Am I correct in assuming that I’m part of your current investigation in a case?”

The First Investigator worked up quite a sweat. He didn’t like to give out information that wasn’t meant for other people’s ears. On the other hand, he knew that he would grit his teeth

out at Mandy if he failed to give the subtle sportswoman a plausible answer to her persistent questions. "We are currently on a break, Mandy," he lied cheerfully. "Indirectly, however, you have hit the bull's eye with your hunch... It's true, we are actually working on a case right now."

"Oh?" Mandy made sure. "What do you mean by 'indirectly'?"

Acting was a great passion of the First Investigator from an early age. Without much difficulty, he managed to put a show for Mandy.

"There is a bereavement. Pete's godmother passed away unexpectedly last week. Since then, our detective agency has taken a temporary break."

"And?" Mandy's sympathies were limited. "What do I have to do with that?"

"Again, only indirectly," Jupiter continued. "Nevertheless, there is a significant connection between your fainting spell and the death of Pete's godmother. The name of the fatal victim is Amy Scream."

"Excuse me?" Mandy's neck hairs started to stand up. "But... but that's just..."

"The lady, who for some unknown reason fell under the spell of the music last Saturday at Planet Evil and then lifelessly sank to the ground," Jupiter continued.

Mandy hit her hand against her forehead. "Good gracious! What is going on?"

"Now do you see what I'm getting at?" Jupiter began to triumph inside. Outwardly, he continued to play the victim. "Unfortunately, Pete, Bob and I were present at this tragic accident. We were also in this disco and were able to witness firsthand how the devil's deejay seemed to have bewitched almost all patrons. And it seems that you were one of his chosen victims."

"You scare me, Jupiter. You give me the creeps. Because if that were really true, then—" In the middle of the sentence, Mandy suddenly paused and became thoughtful.

"What—then?" Jupiter carefully followed up.

Mandy looked at him seriously. "Can you keep quiet?"

"Of course." Jupiter looked her straight in the face. "In honour and in conscience!" To underline his credibility, he even raised his right hand.

"All right," she hesitantly began. "My fainting spell... I think it was caused by something other than a lack of oxygen or cigarette smoke..." She swallowed. "Things don't seem right at Planet Evil. I know it sounds silly, but... do you believe in magic?"

"I honestly cannot give you a clear answer to this question," Jupiter admitted openly. "Through our detective work Pete, Bob and I were confronted with all kinds of strange occurrences which at first glance seemed to have something supernatural about them. On closer inspection, however, these so-called 'supernatural phenomena' always turned out to be man-made magic. And Hamley is certainly playing with marked cards."

"Hamley? Never heard of him," Mandy said. "Is that the headless deejay's name?"

Jupiter nodded. "Would you like to tell me in a few words about your night at Planet Evil? Preferably as factual as possible."

"No problem." Mandy straightened her skirt. "I don't really care for discos. As I said, for a health-conscious athlete like myself, these smoky dance halls are pure poison and not very tempting. But last Friday, two dates of mine broke. And since I didn't want to be stuck at home alone, I gave myself an inner jolt, dressed up and stepped into Planet Evil, which my best friends have been raving about for weeks. Besides, I thought I might run into some of them there."

The First Investigator got impatient. If Mandy continued to embellish her report in such detail, the long pause would certainly not be enough to get all the information he needed for his investigation.

“But you’re probably only interested in the facts.” She seemed to have guessed his thoughts. “To be honest, I found it rather dull at the disco. At first I just stood in the corner, watching the people on the dance floor and kept asking myself what was it that they liked about this place? Somehow I didn’t feel like dancing either, especially since none of my friends were there. But suddenly this creepy deejay entered the stage and all of a sudden that music started to play, which involuntarily captivated me. I just wanted to dance...”

“What was that exactly?” Jupiter probed further. “Was it the music or the demonic appearance of this headless deejay that drew you to the dance floor? Try to remember exactly.”

“I hadn’t really thought about it before,” Mandy recalled. “But now that you ask me that, I’d say it was both. This music and the deejay somehow fused into one. I felt like I was magically drawn to it. I had never experienced anything like that before, especially since dancing is the only physical activity that is not part of my great passion. But at that moment, I was no longer master of myself. I danced like a maniac to a mad song, whose title was *Devil Dancer!* And you know what the scariest part of the whole thing was? The deejay seemed to focus on me the whole time from his non-existent eye sockets.” Her voice was shaking. “All of a sudden, everything started spinning around me and I blacked out. When I came to on the ground, two paramedics bent over me, who were about to carry me on a stretcher from Planet Evil. But I refused! Can you imagine that? I wanted to keep dancing! For reasons I don’t understand, I couldn’t or wouldn’t leave the disco.”

The shrill ringing of the school bell made Mandy jump. Without hesitation, she grabbed her backpack and stood up from the bench. “Excuse me, Jupiter, but I have to go now. I don’t want to be late for gym class.”

“I don’t blame you,” the First Investigator said. “May I approach you again if there are any further questions regarding the devil’s deejay?”

Mandy turned to leave. “If it’s absolutely necessary. Norman Hamley is already giving me nightmares!” With a beating heart, the First Investigator looked at Mandy leaving until she disappeared into the gym.

Now at last, he was certain—there was something fishy about Mandy’s words. The case began to unravel...

## 11. False Start

Ice-Dealer, the newly opened ice cream parlour in Rocky Beach, has become increasingly popular, especially among the young residents of the small coastal town. Luigi, the Italian owner of the shop, offered his guests a huge selection of forty different types of ice cream, all of which he said he made himself. From avocado to candy floss, his ice cream bar was full of all kinds of flavours that were a real challenge to try.

The Three Investigators had visited the ice cream parlour after school to exchange the results of their schoolmate interviews. They sat undisturbed at one of the tables at the back. All three had large ice cream sundaes, each with three different scoops in it. Before they officially opened their discussion, they let their portions go around the table so that each of them get to taste all the different flavours. Liquorice, peppermint and cola ice filled the First Investigator's cup. Chewing gum, Brazil nut and carrot were Pete's choice, while Bob had chosen papaya, cinnamon and potato chip flavour.

Bob sourly twisted the corners of his mouth. "Highly exotic."

"Almost idiotic," Pete added jokingly. "Next time I'll have to resort to the tried and tested lemon ice cream. At least I'll know what I'll get."

Jupiter, on the other hand, found it delicious. He revelled in the pleasure. "In spite of these delicacies, we should now move on to business." He banged his spoon on the sundae. "I hereby declare the session open... Let's start with you, Bob. Were you able to find out anything interesting?"

Bob poked around embarrassed in his ice cream. "Well, I don't have too much to report, especially since Ronald Bridge and Mitch Cooper seemed to be more interested in exchanging baseball cards than what happened at Planet Evil."

In short words, Bob recounted the conversation with the two schoolmates. Even Jupiter and Pete could not draw any new conclusions from that.

After the Second Investigator had also told his fiasco with Lucy Stryker, Jupiter pushed his now empty ice cream sundae aside and happily wiped his mouth with a napkin. Then he reported how he was able to elicit information from Mandy, who was initially taciturn, and thanks to his phenomenal memory, he was able to reproduce almost the exact wording of their conversation.

"The way Mandy described the situation," he summarized afterwards, "it seems clear to her that Norman Hamley makes use of magical arts... otherwise, she can't explain why she fell under his spell and ended up lying unconscious at the disco."

Pete lowered his voice. "According to Bob, Ronald doesn't rule out the possibility of supernatural forces acting on the patrons at Planet Evil. Even Miss Carrera, our client, has serious doubts about Norman Hamley's actions. And Lucy Stryker is also very upset. The fear was plain for all to see."

"The question is, who or what is it that frightens them so much?" Jupiter asked.

"Norman Hamley, of course!" Pete hissed excitedly. "And this creepy guy is starting to give me a stomach ache, too. If there's real magic at work here, I'm off this case. I'm not kidding. We've solved well over a hundred cases, what's the difference if we file one as unsolved?"

Jupiter smiled. "In principle, there's no reason why not."

"What? Could you repeat that again?" Pete exclaimed in disbelief.

"I said, I don't see why not, in principle," Jupe repeated.

Suspicion arose in Pete. "I know you better than the back of my hand, Jupiter Jones.

There must be a catch."

"On the contrary," Jupiter replied cunningly. "You can take my word for it. However, if it turns out that Norman Hamley's manipulations are in the realm of the supernatural, we will throw in the towel immediately. Because this so-called phenomenon is beyond even me. However, I am referring explicitly to the 'if'. But as you can probably already guess, I do not want to and cannot believe that. Therefore, until we are convinced otherwise, we will stick to the plan we have already decided upon."

"Tailing Norman Hamley?" Bob recalled.

"That's right." As he said, the First Investigator got up from his chair and put on his jacket. "This weekend we'll be waiting for the deejay at Planet Evil. And frankly, I can't wait to see what kind of face he's got hiding under his robe!"

The following Friday night was starry and relatively warm. The Three Investigators sat huddled together in Pete's MG and watched with interest how, on the opposite side of the street, in front of the entrance area of Planet Evil had a constantly growing number of patrons.

If everything went on normally, it could only be a few minutes before Norman Hamley would leave the disco through the back exit to get into his limousine and drive away.

"A perfectly chosen location," Bob praised the First Investigator with a pat on the back. "From here we have a complete view. No matter which way Hamley will leave Planet Evil, he has no other choice but to use this access road."

Pete cast a sceptical glance at the Hamley's limousine. "I don't want to alarm you, colleagues. But if Hamley gets in his luxury limousine and pushes the accelerator, he'll lose us at the corner two blocks away."

Bob remained confident. "Don't get too worried about that, Pete. Firstly, Hamley won't even know we're on to him. After all, you've shown us your talent for subtle vehicle tracking many times. And secondly, Hamley will have to respect the speed limits to avoid unnecessary trouble with the traffic police."

"I hate to disturb your midnight chat, friends," Jupiter interrupted the two of them and pointed to the side window. "But may I humbly point out that the person we are going to follow is already behind the wheel of the limousine and is about to leave."

As if stung by a tarantula, Pete turned the ignition key to start the engine. At that moment, the glaring headlights of the approaching black limousine already grazed the inconspicuously parked MG.

"Heads down!" Jupiter hissed excitedly. With his heart beating, he risked a cautious glance at the luxury car with its dark-tinted windows, which passed by almost silently.

Bob energetically gave the Second Investigator a shot with his elbow. "Did you fall asleep or what? You're gonna have to step on it, man."

"I'd love to," Pete stammered nervously.

"But my car won't start!" He fiddled around with the key in the ignition in panic, while his foot operated the accelerator in vain. "Somehow, things are not starting off well here!"

## 12. A Surprising Turn of Events

There were hectic expressions on Jupiter's face. "Cut the nonsense, Pete, and get this damn thing started!"

"Come on, come on, come on!" begged Pete. "Don't leave me hanging now! I'll buy you a new exhaust pipe, and from now on I'll drive you through the car wash regularly!"

Bob couldn't believe his ears. "Maybe you should stroke the steering wheel, Pete. Your car seems to be suffering from deprivation of love!"

At that moment, the familiar rattling of the engine sounded. Relieved, Pete drove his shirt sleeve over his wet forehead and steered the MG out of the car park. He was beaming all over his face. "I told you, a little love does wonders even for cars!"

"Don't distract yourself now! Focus on following him!" The First Investigator's hands clawed tense at the worn out cushion of the back seat. "Fortunately, we are in a good neighbourhood here with many people on the road at night. Cars are moving forward at walking speed."

Hamley's limousine was actually still in sight. The black Lincoln had to wait for the traffic lights to change. When the light changed to green, the traffic started moving again. Leisurely, without the slightest sign of haste, the vehicle to be shadowed started moving again and followed the flow of traffic.

Without any difficulties, Jupiter, Pete and Bob kept the necessary safety distance. The route Hamley took clearly indicated that the deejay was heading for the next exit on the highway towards Bakersfield.

"Doesn't this route look familiar to you?" Jupiter asked. "Jumping to conclusions may be against my analytical mind, but I think I already know where the pursuit will end."

Pete held the steering wheel firmly with both hands. "I'm busy with the traffic, Jupe. Would you please not distract me during the drive? Just get to the point."

Relaxed, the First Investigator let himself sink into the back seat. "You just make sure you stay on it, Pete. If you can wait a few more minutes, you'll see the light."

Pete and Bob exchanged questioning looks. They knew that from now on that it was pointless to pester the First Investigator with more questions. Tensely their eyes followed the tail lights of the vehicle in front. The coastal road was now hardly frequented.

Shortly afterwards, the flashing light of the Lincoln signalled the next change of direction. The black limousine turned into a narrow driveway and its headlights shone onto a church from the pioneer era.

"Gee, Jupe," Bob admitted remorsefully. "This church looks familiar! Pull over, Pete!"

"But why?" Without getting an answer, Pete slowed down and brought the MG to a halt under a tall tree. After he had switched off the engine and the headlights, he looked through the windscreen with narrowed eyes.

The Lincoln drove up the driveway to a small unlit house, next to which was a garage. The garage door opened automatically and closed a few seconds after the vehicle had disappeared inside. "Now I finally understand!" Pete pushed out. "This is the house of Jim Cowley, the owner of Planet Evil."

The First Investigator reacted a little overbearingly. "You're real quick thinkers to me, fellas. You should've seen the sign for Bakersfield, which is the destination Norman Hamley would most likely have in mind."

"So Cowley and Hamley live together or at least are very good friends," Bob concluded. "How else do you explain the deejay being able to drive into the garage without any trouble?"

"But what does that tell us?" Pete asked.

"Pete, we will get to the bottom of immediately." Jupiter got out of the MG and flipped up the collar of his jacket, shivering. The air had become very chilly.

Bob and Pete also left the car and looked sceptically over to the house.

"We're up for any adventure, Jupe," Bob expressed his concerns. "But please don't tell us you're planning on ringing Cowley's door bell in the middle of the night asking Norman Hamley for an interview."

"There are other ways to get important information. Follow me, fellas." Under the cover of darkness, Jupiter hurried single-mindedly towards the house, behind whose window on the ground floor, a bright light was shining at that moment.

Jupiter crept closer. The blinds of the living room window had been pulled down, but the narrow slits between the individual slats allowed a view into the interior of the room.

Silently, Pete and Bob followed the First Investigator, who was already crouched in front of the window in observation position. He waved his friends to him and put his finger to his lips as a warning.

The living room was only sparsely furnished. In addition to a set of seats with an accompanying table and an office desk with countless files and mountains of paper piled up, there was a stereo system with impressive loudspeakers, and of all things, a life-size tailor's mannequin.

Suddenly The Three Investigators flinched. In the immediate vicinity, a dark shadow flitted by behind the blind. Instinctively Jupiter, Pete and Bob lowered their heads.

A few seconds passed before the detectives carefully took another look. The man was standing there with his back to them, calmly unzipping a large sports bag. With a solemn gesture, he took a shiny black piece of clothing from it and placed it over his arm. Even from a distance, The Three Investigators could clearly see that this was without a doubt the devil's robe of the mysterious deejay.

Slowly the man walked towards the tailor's dummy and carefully put the garment on it. The three boys were overcome by an unpleasant shiver, for the man still had his back on them, and so Norman Hamley's face remained unseen.

The man reached into his shirt pocket and pulled out a packet of cigarettes. He put on a cigarette, lit it, and blew the blue smoke into the air with relish.

What happened next happened so quickly that Jupiter, Pete and Bob had no chance to react. In a fraction of a second, the person turned around and approached the blind with rapid steps. With a lightning-like movement, a hand sprang out, which unlocked the window with a jerk and brought it into the tilt position. The Three Investigators held their breath. Without being able to move, they were amazed to see, not the face of the mysterious deejay Norman Hamley, but the face of Jim Cowley!

Jupiter's heart was pounding like a jack hammer. Had the owner of Planet Evil noticed them? Before the First Investigator could further ponder over this question, The Three Investigators heard the penetrating ringing of a telephone through the tilted window. Cowley rushed briskly toward the sofa and fished his mobile phone out of his jacket.

"Yes?" he said.

Highly concentrated, The Three Investigators pricked up their ears. Cowley lowered himself onto the couch.

"Don't go crazy. So far everything is going like clockwork. People are buying our scam." He puffed on his cigarette. "Have you taken care of your passport in the meantime? The people involved are getting nervous."

He pulled the ashtray towards him. "In four days, you can put on a sombrero and eat all the tacos you want. That is something to look forward to, isn't it?" He laughed. "The day after tomorrow, you take a taxi and come here by 10:00 am... Until then, hold the fort and don't do anything rash. We'll finalize everything on Sunday morning. This will be the most difficult hurdle for the company... How? ... Relax. I'll call you tomorrow again. Get some sleep. I'm gonna take a quick shower before bed. It is pretty uncomfortable wearing this robe... What? ... Yeah, I got it. All right. Sleep tight."

With a satisfied grin, Jim Cowley put the mobile phone on the glass coffee table and smothered the embers of his cigarette in the ashtray with relish. Then he rose from the upholstery with a groan, left the living room and turned off the light.

Silently, Jupiter signalled to his two friends to retreat. Only when The Three Investigators were back in Pete's MG did the First Investigator break the long silence. "Do you finally agree with me now, Pete? In the meantime, even the most sceptical person must admit that there's no real magic here."

Bob yawned. "At this time of the day, it is clearly too late for intellectual thinking, and I still have some doubts. Could someone explain to me why Jim Cowley left Planet Evil in Norman Hamley's limousine, but without the deejay, but with his devil's robe?"

"You must be really tired, Bob," Jupiter teased. "It was very clear from the phone call—Norman Hamley and Jim Cowley are the same person!"

## 13. Musicology

The next afternoon, Bob was the last one to arrive at Headquarters. He let himself fall into the armchair and took off the sneakers off his sweaty feet. “I have not been idle this morning, friends, and have learned some interesting facts!”

“In the meantime, I too have made some enquiries,” Jupiter said with sparkling eagerness. “I was on the phone with Monique Carrera!”

“And what’s the result?” Pete asked.

“We now know for certain that the person impersonating Norman Hamley to Miss Carrera is without a doubt Jim Cowley!”

“And that’s one hundred percent sure?” Bob asked while he was busy getting his socks off as well.

“Totally waterproof and vacuum-sealed. I asked Monique Carrera for a detailed personal description of the man with whom she recorded the song *Devil Dancer* in the studio. Her answer provided the sure proof that the alleged deejay Norman Hamley is a phantom figure. He does not exist.”

“I can understand that,” Bob said, “but what could Cowley possibly want with that?”

“We must put this question on hold for now,” Jupiter said. “Likewise, the phone call he made in the middle of the night makes no sense to me. What was he talking about?” He gave a heavy sigh. “By the way, what interesting news did you find out about Norman Hamley, alias Jim Cowley, Bob?”

“Nothing about Cowley... but about his alleged process for subconsciously influencing the listeners with the help of certain sounds,” Bob replied mysteriously. “I called managed to contact Sax Sendler despite the weekend. Sax knows the music business inside out. I asked him whether he might know of a specialist in music and composition. Then he gave me the name Andrew Beurmann. This man is retired, but still holds occasional seminars in various art academies and is a professor of musicology.”

“You’ve already looked him up, right?” Pete surmised.

“Exactly. Without prior notice, I was standing at the door of his private villa and was even promptly invited in by him after I had promised to take no more than fifteen minutes of his precious time.”

“Go on, Bob!” Jupiter impatiently urged. “And please spare us such unimportant details as his possibly obscure furnishings, his quirky voice or his eccentric outer appearance. We are only interested in the relevant facts.”

Bob waved it away with a grin. “You got it, Jupe. Although I almost fell backwards when I entered his villa. This man has the largest and most extensive collection of harpsichords in the world! The corridor to his office, where he led me to, turned out to be a real labyrinth. Everywhere there were keyboard instruments in the way!”

“To the point, Bob!” the First Investigator warned emphatically.

“I asked the professor straightforwardly whether he considered it possible and technically feasible to manipulate people with the help of musical tones to such an extent that they no longer have one hundred percent control over their behaviour and do things that they themselves can no longer influence.” Bob took a breather. “His answer surprised me as much

as it made me startled. He said people have been using this technique of suggestion for thousands of years. For example, in church, a musician who plays the organ during a service knows exactly which pitches of his instrument he can use to trigger a feeling of joy and festivity in the audience—and not only that, it can also do the same for anxiety, awe and sadness. This is also true of composers of movie music. It is precisely in this genre that the feelings of the audience are deliberately played with. No matter if it is a love movie, a horror flick or a western, the background music is often used to convey a corresponding set of feelings. Often, however, viewers are not even aware that it is the music and not the dialogue or the plot that evokes certain feelings in them. In part, the viewers don't even notice it!"

In the meantime, Jupiter had opened a bag of gumdrops and put several of them in his mouth. Now he passed the sweets on to Bob and Pete.

"A plausible representation," he remarked, chewing. "Have you watched that scary movie *Halloween* by John Carpenter? I read that in the test screening, that movie was a complete flop to the audience and was judged to be yawningly dull."

"How can this be happening?" Pete asked. "As far as I know, this horror thriller was a huge hit with the public!"

"Indeed," Jupiter said. "What happened subsequently was that the director removed all the music from the movie and replaced it with a completely new soundtrack. Creepy, metallic sounds from a synthesizer now provided thrills in the scenes. Those new electronic sounds were the only reason why the audience was suddenly scared to death and sometimes even cried out in unintentional horror during the performance! But the plot was still exactly the same."

"An excellent comparison," praised Bob. "Jim Cowley seems to be using the same technique Carpenter used in his *Halloween* flick. The difference, however, is that our deejay is able to respond to his audience flexibly and spontaneously during his hour-long show. With trained eyes, hidden behind his mysterious masquerade, he must be able to observe exactly what is happening on the dance floor and then play his magic game with the actors he spotted. Those dancing as if in a trance tell him by means of their body language how far they are now under his spell and whether their intoxicated state can be further enhanced by additional sound and light effects."

Pete took a CD from the shelf. "Jupe and I listened to Monique Carrera's song again earlier. It's a great song, but it didn't have that stirring feeling that we had at Planet Evil."

"No wonder," Bob said. "According to Professor Beurmann, you need a very powerful machine to produce the desired effect of suggestion on the listener. A portable CD player simply lacks the necessary power to convey the subconsciously stimulating frequencies."

"But then it is highly questionable how Jim Cowley manages to encourage people to buy this CD," Jupiter wondered. "Even if the piece is played on the radio, what percentage of the population has a sophisticated sound system at home? And to achieve the desired manipulation, it will not be enough to play the single *Devil Dancer* only at Planet Evil. I think that—"

The First Investigator's remarks were interrupted by a timid knock on the door of Headquarters.

Surprised, Jupiter turned and opened the door.

"Mandy!" cried Pete in delight. Jupiter's eyes began to glow.

The girl remained restrained in the door frame. "May I come in?" she asked, barely audibly.

"Of course!" With a wave of his hand, Jupiter offered her a place on a camping chair. "What's wrong?"

She looked sincerely at The Three Investigators in the eyes. "I believe I have made a grave mistake. I really need to talk to you guys about that!"

## 14. Lies and Deceit

“So tell us.” Jupiter looked at Mandy expectantly.

“I’ve had a guilty conscience for days. More specifically, since the time you questioned me in the school yard about my visit to Planet Evil.” The girl was visibly uncomfortable.

“May I ask what caused this guilty conscience?” Pete asked.

Mandy loosened her braid and shook her shoulder-length hair. “Perhaps I would have continued to withhold the truth from you, but the thought of Amy Scream being your godmother, Pete, who’s being buried tomorrow at the Rocky Beach cemetery, I just can’t keep up the lie.”

The mouth of the Second Investigator remained open. He was about to say something but Jupiter beat him to it.

“I knew straight away that you lied to me at the school yard, Mandy. In fact, you didn’t do it very well.”

“Could you explain that to me in more detail?”

The First Investigator grinned superiorly. “When I mentioned the name Deejay Hamley to you, you pretended you’d never heard that name before. But as the conversation progressed, you made a crucial mistake. A certain sentence on your part convicted you of making a false statement. May I quote?”

Mandy’s eyelids began to flutter nervously. “I’m asking for it.”

“You said, ‘Norman Hamley is already giving me nightmares!’”

“So what?” she asked, irritated. “What was so strange about that?”

Jupiter crossed his arms. “You claimed that you have never heard of Hamley before, and I did not mention his first name to you. Then how could you know that his name is ‘Norman’?”

“I... well... I have to...” the girl stammered helplessly.

“It doesn’t matter now,” Jupiter generously conceded. “Why don’t you tell us where you heard about Amy Scream’s funeral?”

“I saw the obituary in the local Rocky Beach paper and there was the date and time of the funeral.”

Jupiter played the absent-minded. “That’s right, I almost forgot again. What more do you want to tell us now?”

Depressed, Mandy took a deep breath. “Amy Scream was not the victim of psychic or occult powers conjured up by the supposed devil’s deejay. She died, it would appear, through her own fault.”

Pete made every effort to play the grieving godchild. “What are you trying to say?”

“Did you really not know?” Mandy sighed. “You shouldn’t say evil things about the dead, but it was an open secret, and she never made a secret of it herself. Your godmother, despite her old age, was always taking party pills.”

“To be honest, it’s the first time I’m hearing of it now,” Pete pretended unsuspectingly. “Are you sure it’s not just a nasty rumour?”

Jupiter intervened energetically. “What does it matter now? More important to me is the question why you suddenly rule out the assumption that Deejay Hamley was not only slightly

responsible for her death?"

"Quite simply, Norman Hamley has no more magical powers than an illiterate man can do a crossword puzzle," Mandy revealed. "The whole show, which the deejay celebrates at the witching hour on the weekend, is a clever swindle! I, myself, am living proof."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Bob asked.

Mandy blew an annoying lock of hair out of her face.

"At Planet Evil, nothing is left to chance. Norman Hamley has staged the whole spell to bring his performance into the media spotlight. My modest role in front of the patrons was to pretend to go into a trance on the dance floor at a specific time... and as a crowning finale, I was to faint and collapse. For this show, I was generously rewarded with an annual ticket for free entrance to Planet Evil."

For a few seconds, a surprised silence spread throughout Headquarters. Even the First Investigator, who was not so easily thrown off track by anything, was left speechless by Mandy's confession. "I can't believe it! I've got to get over this."

Suddenly Bob rode up in a rage. "What's there to get over, Jupe? Mandy had us fooled by every trick in the book! ... And all to make money for the enterprising Jim Cowley!" Impulsively, he took a step towards his schoolmate. "Who else has been in this monkey circus? Are Ronald, Lucy and Mitch part of the con artist's gang?"

Mandy nodded sheepishly.

Pete went through it like a power surge. "And what about Jeffrey? Is he involved with this company too?"

"No, as far as I know. In any case, he wasn't there for the introductory talk."

"Introductory talk?" Jupiter followed up with interest. "How was that for?"

"The whole thing kicked off about three weeks ago when my friend Lucy lured me with a delightful offer. It was a cool job that required acting ability. We were supposed to help a discotheque which was already established in the scene but still needed a strong increase in patrons. For this purpose we were invited to an introductory talk at Planet Evil."

"During a two-hour presentation, attended by about twenty young people, we were given a quick explanation of the basic rules of conduct for what we should do during Norman Hamley's planned shows."

"What were the rules?" Pete asked.

"The aim of the production was simple," Mandy openly stated. "As soon as Norman Hamley stepped onto the podium and the first bars of a certain song sounded, we were supposed to mingle inconspicuously with the patrons on the dance floor and pay prophetic homage to the deejay. It was suggested that exaggerations in the form of eccentric dance interludes and euphoric screams were definitely desired. This deliberately planned performance achieved its full effect."

The First Investigator snapped his fingers. "This method is quite common. From the simplest show on television to the most questionable events of fanatical followers of the faith, this principle seems to work again and again."

Pete raised his head questioningly. "What is the principle involved, Jupe?"

"To carry other people away by feigning euphoria in order to trigger a feeling of enthusiasm in them. And we too were exposed to the phenomenon of mass suggestion at Planet Evil."

"That's what it was all about," Mandy confirmed. "And believe it or not, everyone involved enjoyed the spectacle. None of us ever dreamed that anyone would be seriously hurt. The terrible misfortune of your godmother, Pete, was a tragic accident that left us all in

a bad way. How do you think we all felt, since, as you can imagine, we were sworn to absolute secrecy?"

"How can you maintain silence in the event of an unforeseen death?" The Second Investigator touched his head in disbelief.

Mandy was incapable of an impulse. She remained rooted to the middle of the room. "I'm really not sure if I'm at fault. In any case, we were told after the accident that Amy Scream's death was due to her extravagant lifestyle and that we had no need to blame ourselves. And that's all I have to say about this matter right now."

Mandy got up from her chair. With her head bowed, she turned and left without saying goodbye.

Bob was the first to find his voice again. "I'm at a loss for words, fellas! I have to digest this. Can you imagine that? Mandy and the others led us down the slippery slope with a dirty trick!"

Pete made a scornful face. "Much more important to me is the fact that behind all this magic, there was nothing else but a coldly thought-out advertising strategy, which had the purpose to bring more patrons to Planet Evil. We and Monique Carrera can sit back in our chairs and concentrate on more important things from now on."

"My sentiments exactly, Pete." Bob took a partially opened pack of orange juice from the refrigerator, put it to his lips and emptied the contents in a few gulps. "This story wouldn't be much of a detective story if it were written in the first place. Our investigation was peppered with suspense, but the resolution shouldn't be too exciting for even the most undemanding reader."

With his eyes closed, Jupiter let his head sink to the table and remained in this position for several minutes.

"Don't take it so hard, Jupe," Pete tried to cheer him up. "In the career of every detective, there are just the big cases, but also the less spectacular ones. Besides, you can also look at it from the positive side. If Mandy hadn't come clean with us, you'd still be expecting some kind of frame-up crime behind what happened at Jim Cowley's disco. So let's look forward to the next client, who I'm sure will give us another exciting assignment."

"Oh, yeah?" Jupiter raised his head impulsively. "How about this case? Why is Pete Crenshaw secretly taking drugs?"

"Jupe, are you crazy?" Bob replied with indignation. "What's got into you all of a sudden?"

"It's not my state of mind you should be worried about, Bob, it's Pete's, I think!"

Bob looked at Jupiter with a distraught look. "Have I come to the wrong movie or what's going on here?"

"Only Pete can help us to clarify the matter, as the only other witness has already died and according to Mandy's statement will be buried tomorrow morning!"

With a chalky pale face, the Second Investigator hid his hands in his trouser pockets, unsettled.

"It... is true," he stammered bashfully. "Jupe is correct... as Amy Scream slipped me a stimulant pill."

"This statement is only half a confession," Jupiter judged strictly. "After all, I saw you put the party pill in your mouth afterwards!"

Bob lost his temper. "I don't believe this, Pete. Tell me it's not true!"

"I saw it clearly." The First Investigator didn't let himself be fooled. "I saw Amy Scream pull Pete off the dance floor, unscrewed a little bottle, took a pill from it and gave it to him.

After she said something to him, I saw him putting the pill in his mouth. Her persuasion obviously worked."

Bob still could not believe what he heard. "Pete, say something! Is it true what Jupe is saying?"

The Second Investigator shook his head in confusion. "Amy Scream actually offered me a party pill from her bottle. She said that if I take it, it would be the ticket to happiness. Granted, for a moment of derangement, I was truly tempted to give in to her urging, but I did not eat the pill."

"Do you think I saw wrongly?" cried Jupiter indignantly.

"In this case, definitely!" Pete defiantly joined Jupiter at the table. "If you had pointed your goggle eyes at me for even a few seconds longer, you would have noticed that I put the pill in my mouth, but spat it out again after a few seconds and let it disappear in my trouser pocket. And it's still in my pocket today."

With a quick movement he pulled out his hand and put the evidence in front of the astonished First Investigator with pointed fingers. "I realize I should never have accepted this red party pill, but after all, everybody makes mistakes, don't they?"

Bob breathed a sigh of relief. "You stood firm, Pete. That's a real reason to be proud of yourself. Who knows what nasty chemicals have been mixed together?"

"Congratulations." Jupiter shook hands with Pete. "I hope you can forgive me again for falsely accusing you, but first and foremost I was concerned about your health."

"Come on, Jupe, stop it," joked Pete. "Otherwise I'll start to cry for all the emotion I have. To be honest, I'm damn glad our case has such a happy ending!"

## 15. The Final Resting Place

The Rocky Beach cemetery was sparsely visited on the following Sunday morning due to the persistent rainy weather. When Pete locked his mountain bike to a bicycle stand in front of the main entrance, he was already impatiently awaited by his two detective colleagues.

“Overslept again, have you? You’re ten minutes late, Pete,” Bob said to him reproachfully. “You’re lucky we wisely decided to bring our raincoats.”

Jupiter pulled the protective hood deeper into his forehead. “There is no shelter to be found around here, where one could take cover from the rain. Therefore, we should get over with this as soon as possible.”

“Hold on, Jupe,” Pete interjected questioningly. “This is all happening a bit too fast for me now. You called me at the crack of dawn this morning to ask me to be here at 11 o’clock sharp. I know that Amy Scream is about to be buried, but why on earth should we attend this ceremony when our case is closed?”

“Oh, come on,” Bob joked with an ironic undertone. “She was your godmother, after all.”

“This is neither the right place nor the right occasion for stupid jokes,” Pete replied irritated. “So out with it!”

Jupiter put his hand on the shoulder of the Second Investigator, reassuringly. “Our investigations concerning the mysterious events at Planet Evil have been completed, but I feel an inner need to confront the mastermind of this fake performance before we finally close the case. Jim Cowley should not imagine that he has successfully deceived The Three Investigators. For the very reason of the impudent rebuff he gave us at his front door, our detective honour demands that we take this triumph from him.”

“In view of his cold and calculating character traits, however, I think it is highly unlikely to find him among the mourners,” Pete doubted. “Why would a stone-cold businessman be interested in the demise of a drug-addicted patron to his disco?”

“Wait,” Jupiter said mysteriously. Determined, he set himself in motion and, together with Pete and Bob, passed the entrance portal of the winding cemetery grounds. “Follow me, fellas. I have already found out the exact location of the burial site.”

With quick steps, the detective trio hurried on uneven paths and through deep puddles towards the grave site. After only a few minutes, the boys saw a small community of mourners, who had gathered with lowered heads in front of an excavated pit. Even from a distance, it was clearly visible that the coffin had already been lowered.

Intuitively, Jupiter pulled his friends behind a thick fir tree to remain hidden for the time being. Through the thicket of branches the boys were able to observe the events unobtrusively.

“I count nine people who are paying their last respects to Amy Scream,” Pete whispered. Bob moved a little closer and uttered a surprised sound.

“My goodness! Look at that! A television crew is also present! I recognize the reporter from Network TV! Who is surprised, fellas? For a lurid gossip column, the press will wade through mud.” Bob ran his hand over his rain-soaked face.

“I don’t know any of the rest,” Bob continued. “That is... Wait a minute! Jupe, you hit the bull’s-eye! To the left of the minister behind the woman with the umbrella is Jim

Cowley!"

"Bingo!" the First Investigator, confirmed in his premonition, exclaimed a bit too loud.

The owner of Planet Evil seemed to have an exceptionally sensitive hearing. With the instinct of a predator, he suddenly raised his head and fixed with a razor-sharp gaze on the spot where The Three Investigators were hiding. Jupiter, Pete and Bob held their breath.

Without hesitation, Cowley broke away from the group and marched straight towards the frozen observers, who now had no opportunity to retreat.

"What in the world are you doing here?" He built himself up in front of the boys, threatening them. "You're worse than ticks in fur!"

Jupiter skilfully played the innocent. "We knew Amy Scream only briefly, Mr Cowley, but her fate was hard on us. We have gathered here to bid a fond and silent farewell."

Mr Cowley was visibly unimpressed by Jupiter's words. "How stupid do you think I am? Do you third-rate detectives seriously think you can rip me off?"

"Rip you off?" Pete repeated in amazement. "You're very much mistaken, mister. Our decency demands that we pay our respects to a popular neighbour."

"One more lie like that, and I'll slap you so hard, you'll never hear or see again! I know all about your hobby thanks to your business card. I've long known that you spend your free time snooping on me."

Jupiter was not in the least impressed by the massive intimidation attempts. "Presumably your secretary, Susan Lockler, informed you of our visit to your studio, telling you some untruth in passing. Quite frankly, she wasn't very friendly with us. We didn't put up with that, of course."

"You can shut your mouth, fat boy. This is my final warning. If you cross my path a third time, you'll wish you'd never met me." With a scowl on his face, Mr Cowley underlined his threat.

Jupiter nevertheless remained steadfast. "Despite your diabolical appearance, contrary to expectations, a soft core seems to hide beneath your rough skin. How else could it be explained that in your limited free time, you pay your last respects to one of your loyal regulars?"

For a second, Mr Cowley lost all facial features. Without a word, he turned away and returned to the small group of mourners as quickly as he had come.

Bob shook his head. "Well, first of all, you can twist and turn it any way you want. But from the looks of things, Cowley will still feel like a winner. Let's give him that triumph. It may be wiser to give in."

"I don't agree with your opinion on this case," Jupiter replied vehemently as he guided his friends towards the cemetery exit. "Cowley will have to answer for the fact that in his—oh, wait." The First Investigator interrupted his speech and pulled out his vibrating mobile phone from under his raincoat. "This will be the text I've been waiting for hours."

"Is there something that we don't know about yet again?" joked Pete as he tried to catch a glimpse of Jupiter's mobile phone display.

With a frown, the First Investigator studied the text message. He then raised his eyebrows suspiciously and began to pinch thoughtfully on his lower lip.

"Is something wrong?" Pete wondered. "Did the secret rendezvous break off?"

Thoughtfully Jupiter let the mobile phone disappear again inside his raincoat. "My suspicions were confirmed..."

"What on earth are you talking about?" Pete urged feverishly. "Don't let us have to pull every word out of your nose!"

"The text message is from Inspector Cotta."

“And?” Bob asked in surprise. “What makes him send you a message?”

“I took the little red party pill that Amy Scream gave Pete at Planet Evil to Inspector Cotta last night. He promised to have the pill examined by the forensic laboratory for its exact composition.”

“What’s the purpose?” Bob asked.

“Because I wanted to know what you, Pete, were ultimately spared from.”

“Makes sense. At least someone cares about me,” Pete quipped. “So? Has Cotta told you the results of the analysis?”

“Exactly. But the result is giving me a real headache.” The First Investigator stopped abruptly. “Get this, fellas—the lozenge couldn’t have hurt even an infant. It was merely harmless chocolate with a red sugar coating!”

Bob laughed distraught. “What, pray tell, is the point of that?”

“I can’t tell you exactly yet. Only one thing is certain is that at our third meeting, we will expose Cowley. And that’s not an empty threat, but a promise, fellas. Within the next twenty-four hours, the final curtain will fall on his scam!”

“And how come you are so certain about this?” Pete asked.

“Use your reasoning, Pete,” Jupiter replied confidently. “From Cowley’s phone call, which we overheard in front of his house, it was clear that an important matter would be dealt with this morning at eleven o’clock.”

“Amy Scream’s funeral!” Bob blurted out. “So that’s what they were talking about!”

Pete was confused. “The only question is, what could be so extraordinary about a funeral? Why was Cowley at the funeral?”

“We will get an answer to this and other questions tomorrow,” said the First Investigator, confident of success.

“Remember what else Cowley said in that phone call? ‘The day after tomorrow,’—that’s Monday—you take a taxi and come here by 10:00 am... Until then, hold the fort and don’t do anything rash.”

Bob couldn’t wipe that grin off his face. “Am I correct in assuming that we’ll be there at 10:00 am tomorrow morning?”

The First Investigator nodded. “By hook or by crook.”

## 16. By Hook or by Crook

The ringing of the church bells, which Jim Cowley had spoken so negatively about to The Three Investigators during their first visit to his front door, really tore the nerves and was hard to ignore even from a distance.

For more than an hour, the boys cowered in Pete's MG equipped with binoculars and observed the house of the owner of Planet Evil at a safe distance as usual.

Bob threw an annoyed look at his watch. "It's already a quarter past ten. Cowley's visitor is already fifteen minutes late. Besides, the eternal ringing of the church bells is getting on my nerves. I have nothing against the harmonious ringing of bells, but the longer I have to listen to it, the more I suspect that the clergy in there are out to win an entry in the *Guinness Book of Records* for the loudest church bell."

"Then turn on the radio," Pete suggested jokingly. "You can drown things out with loud pop music."

"Don't you dare, Bob!" Apparently, Jupiter was not in the mood for fun that morning. "Take your job seriously. We're at a critical juncture right now. It requires extreme discipline and concentration. Be patient! Hopefully, everything will be over soon."

"That's easy for you to say," ranted Pete. "We haven't the faintest idea why we're lying in wait here. Why do you always withhold your information from us, Jupe? As so often, you keep us in the dark."

"Because I'm not even sure myself what is actually being played here," Jupiter went on the defence. "If anything, it's a faintest hint. I'd love to give you more—" He startled. "Here we go! Bob, quick! Give me the binoculars."

Incensed, Bob nestles around his foot.

"What are you doing?" cried Jupiter excitedly. "Hurry up! The binoculars!"

"Yes, yes! I'm getting it! The strap got caught on my shoe!" Bob tugged, pulled and finally tore the strap off the case with a firm jerk. "Here, Jupe!"

In great excitement Jupiter pressed the binoculars to his eyes and stared strained through them. Pete and Bob could also see that a taxi was approaching from a distance. Slowly it came to Jim Cowley's house.

"Can you see who's in it, Jupe?" Bob asked.

"No. The glass is too reflective." Jupiter held his breath. "Now the car stops and Cowley rushes out of the house towards the taxi. He opens the rear passenger door. A person gets out and hands Cowley a large travel bag. Bummer!"

"What do you see?" Pete began to bite his nails in a fit of tension.

"Nothing! Cowley is blocking my view... Now the two people disappear into the house and the taxi goes off. It's a mystery!"

Although Pete still had no idea what was going on, he was so curious that he almost burst. "Couldn't you even recognize the visitor?"

"No more than a dark outline." Jupiter puffed his cheeks. "Now I guess we'll have to take the offensive."

The Second Investigator had a bad feeling about it. "Do you mean to tell me—"

"Exactly," Jupiter seemed to have guessed his thoughts. "If we sit here in the car, we'll never know what Cowley and his visitor are up to."

"I don't like this at all, Jupe," Pete said. "Don't you know it's daylight outside? Cowley will notice our presence as soon as we get anywhere near his house." Pete's hands began to tremble uncontrollably. "And have you forgotten his threat?"

"Empty talk," Jupiter waved calmly. "We're not gonna sneak up to his property like the last time. Instead, we'll take the direct route and just ring his front door bell."

Now a feeling of anxiety rose in Bob as well. "Have you given this a lot of thought? I don't think Pete's concerns are that inappropriate."

"Now, don't too worried about this, fellas. Don't you think I've taken precautions?" The First Investigator pulled his mobile phone out of his jacket. "Naturally I have informed Inspector Cotta of our plans. He knows exactly where we are and, as soon as I call him on his mobile phone, he will be here immediately if, contrary to expectations, there is any difficulty."

"To be honest, that doesn't reassure me very much," Pete expressed his concerns. "By the time Cotta and his men arrive, it may already be too late. I have no doubt that Cowley is capable of killing anyone who gets in his way."

"If you two are freaking out, don't bother. I'll go alone." Determined to do everything by himself, the First Investigator opened the passenger door and got out of the MG.

Pete and Bob looked at each other in astonishment.

"What are we gonna do?" Bob asked.

"I don't know, you tell me," Pete remarked, obviously annoyed with Jupe's methods. "That's the whole problem when he doesn't tell us everything about what he knows. Definitely, he knows much more as he is so confident wanting to march up to the front door. You know our Jupe. He is forever like that. He just wants to hog the limelight, and will never ever change."

"We can't possibly let him go there alone!" Bob argued.

"But what if Cowley makes good on his threat and strikes with his fists?" Pete asked in alarm. "Maybe he even has a gun!"

"All the more reason for us to take Jupe's side," Bob said. "At least it's three against two... a real chance. After all, what are friends for?"

"Well, come on, what are we waiting for?" Pete exclaimed.

With one leap, Pete and Bob pushed open the car doors and rushed after Jupiter, who had almost reached Cowley's house.

When Jupiter noticed that his friends were following him, he stopped for a moment and waved them over to him. "Here you are at last, fellas!" he shouted.

Bob was on high alert. "For goodness' sake, keep it down, Jupe," he hissed at him. "With your loud mouth, you alerted Cowley to our presence yesterday!"

"Do we have anything to hide?" Jupiter said.

At that moment, Pete's eyes began to widen. Silently he raised his arm and pointed to the front door of the house, which had just opened.

"Good morning to you, Mr Cowley!" Exuberantly the First Investigator approached the unscrupulous disco owner and stretched out his hand in greeting. "We are sorry to bother you again, but unfortunately we saw no other way as our hands are tied."

To their amazement, Jim Cowley remained calm—remarkably calm. "What are you doing here?"

"The last time we were on your doorstep, you denied us access to your house," Jupiter continued in a carefree manner. "Today, we have firmly resolved not to let you shake us off

again by hook or by crook."

"I said, what are you doing here?" Cowley repeated his question emphatically. This time it already sounded a little sharper.

"We have come to save you and your accomplice from a great folly. If you voluntarily surrender to the police, this could have a mitigating effect on your expected prison sentence. But frankly, we would much rather discuss this matter with you in your house."

Jim Cowley's face twisted into a vicious grimace. "If any of us is going to end up in prison, it's you three. You can count on it—in a juvenile detention centre! I'm gonna charge you with libel, attempted trespass and extortion. I've got a lot of high-paying lawyers ready to legally wring your necks!"

"You're bluffing, Cowley," Jupiter replied dryly. "And you haven't got a chance against us."

Suddenly timid steps approached behind the front door and a voice was heard. "You ought to invite the boys in, Jim. I think we should talk to them."

With a squeak, the door opened from the inside. In the hall stood an elderly lady in a black, wide-brimmed sun hat. She smiled kindly at The Three Investigators. Pete and Bob began to doubt their perception and found no logical explanation for what they saw.

The First Investigator, on the other hand, felt that his assumption was confirmed. "Well, seems that you're back from the dead, Amy Scream."

## 17. In the Devil's Lair

"Do I look like I came from the grave?" Amy Scream took a searching look in the mirror, which was mounted on the wall above a narrow chest of drawers. "Well, maybe like a mummy."

"You can't really say that either," Jupiter generously admitted after Jim Cowley pulled the front door shut behind them.

"Why don't we sit in the living room," Amy asked The Three Investigators and led them into the room that Jupiter, Pete and Bob had previously only looked at from the outside through the window during their night-time shadowing.

"Can Jim get you guys something to drink?" With a generous wave of her hand, the old lady instructed Jupiter, Pete and Bob to take a seat on the couch.

"Would you try to poison us?" Pete suspected, full of mistrust. "Unlike you, we enjoy life. In this house, we will certainly not touch a drop of anything."

Jim Cowley paused in the door frame and threw a nervous glance at his watch. "So get to the point. What do you want?"

"Didn't I tell you already?" Jupiter enquired emphatically and was about to sink onto the couch.

"Don't sit on that!" With one leap, Cowley reached the sofa and pulled, not a second too soon, the garment from the upholstery where the First Investigator had almost sat on.

Jupiter's eyes started to glow. "The first puzzle has already been solved." He pointed to the garment in Cowley's hands. "The trick that creates the illusion of the headless deejay is really quite simple! There's a high wire frame attached to the shoulders so that if you throw a robe over it, it covers the head and makes it look like the person doesn't have a head."

The First Investigator looked around the room in surprise. "Say, where's the mannequin that was here the day before yesterday?"

Cowley's eyes began to sparkle ominously. "How did you know about the mannequin? Answer me."

"We followed you secretly in our car on Friday night after you left Planet Evil and were able to take a look into your living room from outside between the window slats. Since you had the kindness to open the window a little, we also witnessed a phone call that left us with many puzzles. In the meantime, we have solved them to our satisfaction."

"Let's hear the results, Mr Detective." Jim Cowley sat down in an armchair and lit a cigarette with erratic movements.

"You're a shrewd businessman, Mr Cowley, and you put your profits above everything. How else do you explain inciting young students to put on a show at Planet Evil? The teenagers were supposed to adore Norman Hamley, under whose robe you hide in. You portray a deejay with supposedly magical music abilities that the patrons completely fall for. The hysteria of the raging crowd is nothing but rotten magic. So is Mandy Robin's fainting spell and the euphoric reaction of the audience to Monique Carrera's *Devil Dancer*, which is supposedly based on a scientific process."

Jupiter laughed briefly. "You have succeeded in fooling Miss Carrera with this nonsense, Mr Cowley, but certainly not The Three Investigators. We were quick to spot your scam."

"I don't give a damn about all these accusations!" Jim Cowley burst out. "How I fill my discotheque's coffers and under what pretext I get my artists to sign a record deal is entirely my own business. This admittedly quite sophisticated approach is just a cleverly staged advertising campaign. But I'm not breaking the law at all!"

The First Investigator shook his head decidedly. "I beg to differ, Mr Cowley, or should it have escaped your notice that many of the student you hired are under-aged and are strictly forbidden to enter a discotheque? If Mandy and her friends were to testify in court as to what job they did for you, you would lose your licence to operate a night club, along with a huge fine."

"My respects! You seem to have studied the law book thoroughly," Cowley said sullenly. "But if it makes you feel any better, in the future, I will take meticulous care not to include under-age students in my advertising strategies."

"It's already too late for that, Mr Cowley!" Jupiter replied accusingly. "Because we now know that, in addition to questionable advertising, you used Mandy, her friends and the rest of the extras mainly to back up a stone-cold insurance scam!"

Amy Scream started giggling softly. "You seem like pretty smart foxes to me. Might one enquire politely as to how you got on to us?"

The First Investigator crossed his legs. "In fact, ma'am, it was you who provided us with the last decisive clue. While your acting of a wacky and drug-addicted disco granny was truly admirable, you made a serious mistake at Planet Evil."

Amy Scream pursed her lips. "I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about. Please clarify."

To everyone's surprise, Jupiter pulled out of his jacket pocket a small colourfully printed paper bag. "Well, doesn't this candy look familiar to you, ma'am? Chocolate candy from Toms & Black. They look like button-shaped party pills, except that they are coloured candy shells with a chocolate filling."

"What's this nonsense, boy?" Jim Cowley took a critical look at the bag.

Jupiter tore open the packaging, poured the button-shaped candy onto the surface of the coffee table and fished out a red one, which he demonstratively held out to Amy Scream. "The ticket to happiness, ma'am."

"The very last scream!" Pete added, imitating Amy Scream's tone. "Take one of this, and you will rise above yourself!"

"What is this, Amy?" Cowley turned to the old lady. "What is this nonsense they are putting up?"

"I can give you that answer." Jupiter shoved some chocolate candies in his mouth and started chewing them with relish. "To add credibility to her role, Amy Scream could not resist putting the red candy into a small glass bottle and offering them to some disco-goers as alleged stimulants. Too bad for you, ma'am, that Pete, whom you also gave one to, didn't swallow it—which was very fortunate for us. So we were able to have the alleged drug tested and find out that it was just a harmless candy product made by Toms & Black."

Jim Cowley gazed at Amy Scream in astonishment. "Is it true what those boys are saying, Amy? Did you really dance around Planet Evil and offer drugs?"

"No drugs," the old lady defended herself loudly. "You know perfectly well that they were only harmless chocolate candy. After all, I was supposed to make it plausible that I had a serious drug problem."

Jim Cowley was close to a fit of rage. "All we had agreed upon was that you throw these candies in public yourself, not blindly hand them out to others!"

“What does it matter now?” Jupiter remarked after he had eaten another portion of the chocolate candies. “In any case, you then put on a fascinatingly convincing but crazy dance routine! I have never seen anyone die more convincingly than you, ma’am. My respects! So I suppose that the paramedics who removed you from Planet Evil were probably friends in disguise, correct?”

Amy Scream nodded her head in agreement. “You got it. The same is true of the doctor who signed my death certificate. He owed Jim, who is my nephew by the way, a favour because he once borrowed a lot of money from him that he couldn’t pay back.”

The First Investigator thought for a moment, and then looked at Amy Scream. “So I suspect that you have a life insurance policy that will be paid out in the event of your death, right?”

“Exactly \$750,000,” Amy Scream stated bluntly.

“Wow,” Pete marvelled.

“And I can conclude that the beneficiary from your insurance policy is your nephew then,” Jupiter added.

Amy Scream gave a grin but did not reply.

“The only thing I don’t understand,” Bob intervened. “We were at your funeral yesterday, ma’am, and saw the coffin being lowered into the pit. Who or what was in it instead of you?”

Jupiter pointed to the middle of the room. “Isn’t it obvious?”

“Wait a minute...” The Second Investigator started thinking. “Of course, yes! That was it!”

“What is it?” Bob asked.

“The mannequin!” Pete exclaimed. “The dummy whom Mr Cowley put his robe on the other night. It must be in the coffin now.”

Amy Scream clapped her hands enthusiastically. “Bravo! You’re bright boys!”

“But isn’t it rather risky to remain here in California?” Bob asked. “After all, you are considered dead. What if one of your friends should happen to meet you on the street?”

“The chance is now very small,” Jupiter took the answer. “Because it was clear from Cowley’s phone call that Amy Scream was about to make a decisive change of location. She will be going to Mexico—where, according to Cowley’s phone call, she can put on a sombrero and eat all the tacos she wants!”

In the meantime, Jupiter had eaten up all the chocolate candies and crumpled up the empty plastic bag. “Last but not least, I’d like to know how much of the insurance money your nephew is giving back to you?”

“Exactly half,” said Amy Scream with a charming smile. “So \$375,000 each. That sum will be enough to make my long-awaited retirement possible.”

At that moment, Pete was running cold down his back while goose bumps formed all over his body. “Tell me, ma’am,” he began timidly, “why do you readily tell us all about your scheme?”

The old lady grinned and folded her hands together. “Well, there are two options to go about it, sweetheart. The first would be that I’m already a little senile and my nephew simply forgot to let me be incapacitated.”

“Uh-huh,” Bob mumbled dryly. “And the second option?”

All of a sudden, Amy Scream’s voice took on a sharpness that was unknown to them until then. “The second option would be not to let you leave this house alive with the knowledge you’ve just acquired!”

The old lady had pulled a gun out of her skirt pocket in a flash and aimed it at The Three Investigators who were scared to death.

## 18. Just in Time

"Go, Jim!" Amy Scream told her nephew. "Get the clothesline from the bathroom so that we can tie the three of them up. If we waste any more time, I just might miss my plane to Mexico!"

While Cowley ran out of the living room, the old lady continued to aim the gun at The Three Investigators. Jupiter feverishly thought about how he could use his mobile phone to call Inspector Cotta unnoticed. The First Investigator was sweating from all pores. Cowley hurried back into the living room. In his hands, he was holding a clothesline that was wound up on a piece of wood.

"Tie the boys so tightly that they cannot move," Amy Scream ordered strictly. "You can take care of them later when I'm on the plane."

"Please let us go," Pete begged in a choked voice. "We promise you most solemnly not to go to the police!"

"Shut up!" Cowley hissed, and wrapped the clothesline around the Second Investigator so tightly that it hurt.

Then he went after Jupiter. "Well, well, well, Amy, look what this greasy sausage is hiding in his pocket." With a quick flick of the wrist, he pulled out the mobile phone and threw it to his aunt, who picked it up cleverly.

"You and your eagle eyes," she praised. "Did you also check to see if maybe the other two has one of these on them?"

Cowley, who in the meantime had also successfully tied Bob up, once again checked Pete and Jupiter as a precautionary measure, but he found nothing.

"Why don't you give me the mobile phone back," begged Jupiter. "It's my birthday present!"

"If that's the case, I'll give it back to you," Amy Scream said with an ironic undertone and grinned gloatingly.

"However, I will remove the battery first. After all, Jim and I have no interest in you calling for help." With an experienced grip, she removed the battery from the mobile phone and slipped the deactivated phone back into the vest pocket of the First Investigator's jacket. She put the battery into the pocket of her skirt before she took a quick look at her watch.

"It's time to go, Jim. You might want to get the car out of the garage. In the meantime, I'll take care of the luggage in the bedroom. Do you think we can leave the boys here unattended until then?"

Cowley nodded with a devilish grin. "They can't even move their little finger! You can rely on my tying skills, Amy!"

When Jim Cowley and Amy Scream had left the living room, panic rose in the Second Investigator. "We're finished, fellas! Do you both realize they're going to kill us? That was a hell of an idea, with your precautions contacting Inspector Cotta. What good will that do now? This is about \$750,000 and our lives. And I warned you about Cowley! We're finished! It's over, it's done!"

"Pull yourself together, Pete," Jupiter said. "We have to stay calm and think about how we can get out of this hopeless situation..."

About five minutes had passed when Amy Scream returned to the living room. In her hand, she held a large pair of scissors, with which she approached The Three Investigators menacingly.

“What are you going to do with us?” cried Pete with horror in his eyes.

Without giving an answer, the old lady cut the clothesline at the boys’ feet so that they could move forward with small steps. “Come on now.” She directed The Three Investigators out of the living room and pushed them roughly down the hallway to a steep basement staircase. “Get down there!”

With no other choice, Jupiter, Bob and Pete, followed by Amy Scream, trudged down the stone steps into the darkness and found themselves in a spacious garage.

The First Investigator looked in amazement at a van, which was painted with red stripes on the sides. The inscription at the front of the van read ‘Ambulance’.

“Uh-huh,” Jupiter could not resist commenting. “This is probably the van in which the fake paramedics transported your alleged corpse from Planet Evil. You’ve really thought of everything!”

“Lie down on the floor!” Amy Scream instructed Jupiter, Pete and Bob, who obeyed without resistance.

Wordlessly, the old lady took a roll of tape from the basement shelf and began to wrap the feet of The Three Investigators tightly one after the other. Escape was no longer an option for the boys.

“Every now and then, I don’t trust my nephew—especially when it comes to eliminating troublesome and intrusive witnesses. That’s why I’ve decided to do it myself.”

Amy Scream opened the driver’s door of the van, sat behind the wheel and started the engine and left it on idle. Jupiter was immediately aware of the old lady’s diabolical intent. After all, he had paid so much attention in chemistry class that he knew that the exhaust fumes of a motor vehicle contained dangerous carbon monoxide! The prolonged inhalation of these fumes in a closed room would inevitably lead to death!

Amy Scream got off the van. Without giving The Three Investigators another look, she left the garage and locked the door, with the exhaust relentlessly released fumes. Biting smoke burned painfully in the lungs of The Three Investigators, who rolled around on the floor coughing and with reddened eyes.

Finally, their senses vanished...

When Jupiter opened his eyes, he found himself in a bed. Opposite him, sitting on a chair, was Inspector Cotta, who smiled at him in a friendly manner.

“Well, Jupe, what do you say?” a familiar voice suddenly rang out beside him. “We are among the living again.”

When the First Investigator turned his head to the side, he saw Bob and Pete lying on the beds next to him. Only now did Jupiter register where he was—in a triple room in a hospital.

“How do you feel?” asked Inspector Cotta. “The doctors thought that all three of you got off with a black eye. You were lucky and had no ill effects on your health.”

Just a moment later, the memories returned to Jupiter. “What about Jim Cowley and Amy Scream? Where are they and how did we get here?”

“You need not worry,” Cotta reassured The Three Investigators. “Jim Cowley and his deranged aunt have been in custody for several hours. Very soon, they will be charged in court.”

Jupiter still felt very dazed. “Did you save us, Inspector?”

Cotta nodded. "Indeed... just in time. I had been worried about you, as I had been expecting a message from you on my mobile phone, but there was none. Finally, I took the initiative myself and tried to reach you via mobile phone.

"However, when a computer voice told me that your number was unavailable, I sensed that you are once again in considerable trouble. So I immediately went with two police cars to the address in Bakersfield that you had given me earlier. When we reached, the criminal duo was about to leave and we detained them just in time. We heard the sound of the van running in the garage, and we rushed to free you three."

The inspector breathed deeply. "By that time, we got in an ambulance—a real ambulance, mind you—and everything worked out well."

Jupiter straightened up. "Jim Cowley and Amy Scream have committed a sophisticated insurance scam, Inspector! The two—"

"I already know everything," Cotta told the First Investigator. "The pair of crooks have already made a full confession. They will be able to spend a few years in jail to review their criminal record. But you shouldn't worry about that now." He pointed slyly to the door. "Outside in the corridor, next to your parents and guardians, there's a crowd waiting for you. Many of your schoolmates are here, and there is even a prominent guest who could hardly wait to thank you."

"A prominent guest?" Pete asked curiously. "Who is that?"

Cotta smiled. "Monique Carrera... As I heard on the radio this morning, she has been at the top of the charts since yesterday with her single *Devil Dancer*."

"Please send the visitors in," Jupiter revelled in anticipation.

When the inspector left the room, Pete scratched his head questioningly. "Wow! Top of the charts? How can that be, Jupe? Do you think there's any truth to Cowley's secret process for composing his music?"

Jupiter shook his head. "I just think that the song and singing are simply good—and once the whole story is in the press, *Devil Dancer* will be at the top of the charts for some time to come. Only Deejay Hamley, alias Jim Cowley, will have to enjoy his success in prison."